



It's mid-August in the Lowcountry â that weird, bipolar time of year when the calendar's shouting â back-to-school!â while the weather's whispering â back to bed.â

Surely even those without school children can sense the clash of energies in the air â the sudden, unnatural mood swing â as sun-burnished, sweat-drenched southerners of all ages reluctantly drag themselves away from their pleasant pursuits and relaxed schedules to once more join the ranks of the industrious.

The days are still long and languid and scorching. Stamina is in short supply. Even a Saturday trip to the beach sounds more exhausting than refreshing. (It's so *far* to Hunting Island. And you have to pack up

wels

and

beach chairs

and stuff. And

deal

with all that

sand.

Sigh . . .) Lounging indoors with drawn curtains, AC, and a good book â or maybe a tasty Netflix binge â that's what you long for, assuming you're not too lethargic to long.

But, no. Chop chop! Gotta get those school supplies and those uniforms! Gotta pick up those class schedules and meet those teachers! Gotta fix that hair and put on those grown-up clothes and prepare to resume your role as chief homework harpy and bedtime enforcer.

Itâ€™s all just too much. Too much, here in the soupy, droopy days of mid-August.

My only child is in high school now, so the demands are different. But as a mom, I still feel a duty to create a â€œback-to-school atmosphereâ€ at our house. This means providing dinner at a respectable hour, making sure it includes vegetables, cutting back on everybodyâ€™s TV time, and getting my daughter off her phone before 3 am. The house needs to be cleaned regularly again, the alarm clocks set each night, and we should all probably start wearing shoes.

I just got tired typing that.

But maybe itâ€™s just me. Some folks seem to have plenty of vim and vigor these days, especially when it comes to presidential politics. Just look at Facebook. People are practically hyperventilating. They are â€œterrified!â€ of Donald Trump and â€œhorrified!â€ by Hillary Clinton, either of whom, they assure me, will â€œdestroy America as we know it!â€ if elected. Blame it on my mid-August malaise, but I just canâ€™t work up that kind of passion at the moment. Oh, I can fear a falling sky with the best of â€œem â€œso ask me in a couple of months when the humidityâ€™s subsided â€œbut as of now, all these expressions of terror, horror, and impending destruction seem a wee bit over-the-top to me. A little hyperbolic. As the kids say . . . meh.

But one does like to stay current. I watched the Libertarian Town Hall on CNN the other night and that was more my speed. No yelling, no name-calling, no flame-throwing. Just two calm, reasonable men sitting on a stage, quietly answering questions. (Bless you, Messrs. Johnson and Weld, for not wearing me out.) Granted, this was not a debate, so there was little reason to get worked up. But even when Anderson Cooper asked tough questions â€œsome you might even call â€œgotchaâ€ questions â€œJohnson and Weld remained cool and collected. Johnson even began one of his answers with the archaic phrase, â€œI may be wrong . . .â€ Now that â€œthat! â€œprovided a rare moment of mid-August excitement for me . . . a shock to my heat-and-rhetoric-addled system. I think I actually went from lying on the couch to sitting.

Since nobody offended a Gold Star family, banished a baby from the premises, told any audacious whoppers or started a riot, this event faded from the news quickly, and weâ€™re unlikely to hear from these two fine gentlemen again. Moreâ€™s the pity. Theyâ€™re very relaxing.

Then again, relaxing is not what weâre after, right? Itâs back-to-school time, and we must snap to!

By the time you read this, the Summer Olympics will be well underway in Rio, and Iâm hoping theyâll provide the jolt of electricity we desperately need here at our house. Because âback-to-schoolâ is about so much more than just going back to school. Itâs about diving back into *life*. Resuming a routine. Stepping up the work ethic. Getting back on schedule at the gym. Using an iron. Getting a haircut.

Back-to-school demands an extreme attitude adjustment from the whole family, and group attitude adjustments are hard to make in mid-August. Itâs hard to muster that brisk fall feeling when itâs 98 degrees.

(If somebody would just put some pumpkins outside the Methodist Church or do a hayride or a bazaar or *something* . . .)

But back to the Olympics. (Sorry. My mind meanders in mid-August.) Iâm counting on these great young athletes to pull me out of my summer torpor. I felt that familiar ping of inspiration at the start of Fridayâs opening ceremony, though it petered out rather quickly. In my opinion, the production began in a dazzling flash of lyrical beauty, then deteriorated into a miasma of pop-cultural noise. (Take that opinion for what itâs worth. Iâm old. A lot of things seem like pop-cultural noise to me.) The parade of nations is always a thrill, but itâs so *long* . . . and who can stay awake that late in mid-August?

I hung in there just long enough to catch Team USA in all its brash, Polo-sporting glory. Many thanks to Brazil for calling our country âEstados Unidos,â which not only makes us sound far more poetic than we are, but bumped us toward the front of that endless line. Otherwise, Iâd have missed our team, and the corresponding lump in my throat. (I live for throat lumps.) Gazing upon the joyful face of the proudly flag-bearing Michael Phelps, I think I felt a flicker of that back-to-school spirit. Just a flicker, mind you, but itâs a start.

So come on, Team USA! Come on, athletes of the world! Itâs been a long, hot summer â in so many ways. We need you. Weâre counting on you. Wake us up, lift us up, fire us up, inspire us! Shake us out of this mid-August mood, Olympians. Whip us back into shape â

body and soul â€” and get us all back to school.

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