

This past weekend I stopped to visit with an Amish friend and purchase some delicious baked goods. We were joking about the affects of power outages from Friday's massive storm. Jokingly she said to me, "We didn't have to change anything. We were already prepared."

I laughed and also recalled a different time and era when we were much more prepared for power outages than we are now.

In small Ceylon where I was raised, in the summer, food was as close as walking out the door. The garden, full of vegetables, was on the east side of the property and the orchards of apples, cherries, pear trees, grapes, strawberry patch, raspberries and rest of our fruit was even closer to the house.

When I wanted a refreshing snack on a hot summer afternoon, depending on the part of the season, I would simply pick a few strawberries, raspberries, pear or an apple.

The main inconvenience at the time when power went out was not having lights at night. We didn't have air conditioning, so I didn't know any better. In the morning on a day when the temperatures approached 100 degrees, we shut all the windows, pulled all the blinds, avoided opening the doors more than we had to and were fairly comfortable inside the darkened house.

In the evening, we would open the windows, allow the country air to flow through the house and sleep near the window if we needed to.

When there was a heat wave such as we've had, my dad, who normally worked from 7 a.m. to 5 p.m., would go to work at 5 a.m. and come home at 3 p.m.

One time when he came in the door, he told my mother that it had been 110 degrees under the asbestos (yes, asbestos) roof where he had been working on the second floor.

He would stretch out on the floor and she would hand him towels wrapped around ice cubes until he could cool down. The thought of purchasing an air conditioner wasn't even a future dream at the time and only the extremely wealthy people had air conditioning in their cars.

When winter storms hit, we still had lanterns from "before electricity" days and they would be filled with kerosene to provide light.

Heat wasn't a worry because we burned wood and nothing changed. In blizzards, we had plenty of food stored in the pantry where shelves of Ball jars were filled with food that had been stored in the summer.

I didn't miss a computer, because we didn't have any and television, which we finally obtained when I was in the third grade, hadn't taken on the habitual meaning that it has to so many now.

The memory that I treasure the most about those days was the way that it brought the family together. We played games, read (yes, books!) and perhaps made fudge, caramel corn or special candies reserved for the time.

Often, neighbors would get together and "enjoy" the outage with primitive forms of "block parties." Rather than feeling inconvenienced and frustrated, it brought us all together. Today, those times are some of my favorite memories of my childhood.

So 60 years later, do I think that we have progressed or regressed? The feelings are very mixed; the modern conveniences are nice, the medical advances and those in progress are wonderful, but I miss the more bonded way of handling such interruptions and times of inconvenience.

Things that we took with a "sigh" and recycled into special moments together need not bring a sense of panic and irritability into people's lives.

I still remember the words of my mother in such times, "Yesterday's gone, with its troubles and heartaches, none of its cares need we borrow, isn't it grand to be living today and looking ahead to tomorrow?"

Works for me!