

The power of losing electricity

The lights flickered once, then twice, and stayed on. Just when we were thinking we might not lose electricity, the neighborhood went dark. We had just enough time to find the flashlights and go to bed.

When we woke up Saturday morning, you could feel the heat creeping into the house. Our boys were fascinated, trying the light switches again and again. Yes, the lights in the dining room don't work either, I said. You're right! Not even the ones in the basement.



We explained that nothing electric would work, not the phones, not the computer, and not the TV. "But what if we're really, really good and we get a movie as a treat?" Leo asked. Sorry, I said. Not even then.

Then we climbed into our car and went shopping. We spent money on marvelous things—Spiderman hand towels, a cupcake carrier, an 85-cent DVD of Superman cartoons—we would never have found if we hadn't been enjoying the store's free air conditioning.



Then we hit the road for Clarksville.

My husband grew up in Holy Trinity parish in Glen Burnie, where his parents met Msgr. Anthony Sauerwein. When Fr. Sauerwein moved to St. Louis in Clarksville, John's family became involved in both parishes, and every year they went to the Clarksville Picnic. John hadn't gone for 20 years or so, but suddenly our day was wide open. Reaching Clarksville would require driving a decent distance, but time in

the car was time in air conditioning. Off we went.

When we got there, it was obvious that Clarksville had been hit by the storm. The traffic light at the church’s entrance was out. Still, we had nothing else to do—and the picnic was on! We picked out a few used books, played on the playground, and shopped the yard sale—where I found a 50-cent stainless steel gravy boat just like my mother’s.



As we walked around the campus, John reminisced about how Fr. Sauerwein—wearing a straw Bing Crosby-style hat—used to hand him and his siblings a bag of change to spend at the picnic. Because of the outage, there was no fried chicken—which meant none of the long lines of hungry people he remembers. John was delighted to see the same little ride there, though it wasn’t running either.

Unfortunately, the church and chapel were locked, so we couldn’t pay a visit. That meant the boys missed out on the three wishes I tell them they can have every time they visit a new Catholic church. But they were hot, and I’m pretty sure their wishes would have been for water, apple juice, and maybe a milkshake.



The next day, once our power had returned—and we know how lucky we were because so many are still in the heat and the dark—I thought about what a blessing Saturday was.

We had a day all to ourselves, unreachable by phone or email. We couldn’t cook with our electric stove or do laundry, so we just played and read and, when it got dark, we slept. Our boys loved pretending we were camping and using flashlights to climb the stairs at bedtime. At one point that afternoon, Leo fell asleep sitting next to me

as we read together, and I got to hold him while he slept. He is growing so very quickly, but he is still content to sleep in his mother's arms.

I couldn't help but think back to our first days with each of the boys in China. Becoming a new parent in another country isn't easy, but part of the pleasure is that you have no household chores or other responsibilities. The phone never rings, and no one knocks on the door. You just focus on your child. Of course, in the hotels in China we had electricity, hot showers, access to boiling water, and magnificent breakfast buffets.

The next morning our power was back, and I heard Leo calling urgently for me. "Mama," he said, as I walked into his room, "can I be a bee for Halloween?"

"Of course," I said—though I'm not starting on any bee costume since this is at least the 15th idea he has had since last October.

"Mama, are the wires fixed?"

"Yes," I said. "The lights are all working now."

I left him for a few minutes, and when I came back, he had his ceiling light, his lamp, and even his nightlight on—and his ceiling fan was set on the highest speed. He was giddy with excitement. So were we all.