

Ode to Summer's End

Written by Laura Packard



The racks and racks of pristine, crisp white fabric lined up like curtains blinded me as soon as I rounded the street corner. My hands trembled at the sight, my hair bristled in the hot, still air.

The day had started out innocently enough. My mom had driven in from Augusta to take the girls to do a little back school shopping. Mom and I observed, as we always do this time of year, how the kids keep going back earlier and earlier during the month of August. Didn't they just get out for summer? It seems almost a dream. And yes, the time was too short; there are still many warm, lazy afternoons for boat rides, day trips and plenty of pool time lying... no shining brightly... up ahead.

And it's just plain too hot, anyway. Just imagining them wrapping their gangly, growing arms, legs and torso in dense poly-blends and itchy cotton while lugging 30 lb book bags enveloped in the relentless Lowcountry August heat makes me want to take to my bed with a pitcher of iced tea and call my mom.... lamenting the injustice of it all and how cruel it can be.

Only she was actually here and this was exactly what we were discussing, well . . . reminiscing about: the good, old days when kids went back to school right after Labor Day when it hit me smack in the face.

There they all stood, proud even in defeat, up and down every retail sidewalk and street. Rows and rows of sales rack soldiers stuffed to the brim with the whitest of white shorts, dresses, pants and shirts with all types of sleeves.

Technically, in terms of astronomy and all things science-y, the last day of summer is officially September 22 as the fall equinox arrives the next day, starting the onset of shorter days in the Northern Hemisphere. Socially, and of course according to all things fashionable,

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wearing white becomes no longer vogue after Labor Day, signaling the summer's final bid adieu as around the axis we spin again.

There are, I am sure, multiple age-old reasons why white is not appropriate after Labor Day. But for this girl, I was told it's because Emily Post said so when I was given her Book of Etiquette the day I turned 16. Now, I know things are vastly different from the early 1900's, but the summer season of parties, revelry and appropriate event wear, especially in the South, will always remain dear. So yes, the summer season, considered Memorial Day through Labor Day, may have started with the Northern city dwellers' desire to escape the daily grind on hot cement streets sending them in droves towards cool mountain air and open villas perched on the side of vast seas. When, summer was "over" and back to the city they would head, there was no need for gauzy white on a cooler fall, sidewalk city street.

But to me, that is what makes where we live so special and wonderfully, outrageously unique. We are not city dwellers, concrete jungle navigators or urbanites so to speak. So as summer ends we do not have to depart; which places us squarely inside the enviable position we sometimes forget we are in. Summer does not have to leave – no, not just yet.

So listen up, my Lowcountry brethren.

I GET IT.

It's ridiculously hot. But let's do this thing.

We've got this.

Remember, we're strong; made from solid sun-soaked mud, robust rip currents, knife-sharp oyster shells and sand dollar-sized sandspurs. We are the stuff of salt, sand and cold beer; the very molecules made of briny, cool water against sun-kissed skin. We are up for anything, no matter the highest or the lowest of the determined South Atlantic tides and varied depths of a rich and life bearing sea.

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And, much like the welsh poet Dylan Thomas, we will *not go gentle into that good night...*
we will
rage, rage against the dying of
(the last summer's)
light.
And
good men, the last wave by, crying how bright
will not wish for a pumpkin-spiced latte. No, may they remain out of sight. And bulky sweaters,
vicious viruses, and short days with hardly any light, well, remember the
wild men who caught and sang the sun in flight, and learned too late, they grieved it on its way,
no,
do not go gentle into that good
(long winter's
) *night.*

I get it, though. I really do. This summer has been especially brutal with no end in sight. Who wouldn't wish away the last few weeks by dreaming of crisp autumn air, skinny jeans and shiny, orange orbs of over-ripened fruit? It's comforting to think of comfort in the form of chilly nights and camp fires swaddled in flannel, especially when standing, sweating and almost passing out in a parking lot when it's 99 with a heat index of 115.

But like anything else, we will soon wish amongst the forever daily grind for constant warmth, long lingering days and the feel of bare skin.

So let's still catch those last few waves, whenever that may be, and wildly and proudly wear our white till the sun slips earlier and earlier behind the lovely and tall Palmetto tree.