

Daylight Savings Time – A Test Of Skill

I hate Daylight Savings Time.

Not for the usual reasons. Some say DST is a good thing – it arguably makes better use of daylight, thereby conserving energy. But it has a huge flaw – it relies on your and my ability to reprogram 15 different gadgets and appliances.

In the old days (the fifties) we had no worries. The drill had been the same ever since DST was adopted - you would pick up your clock, give the stem on the back a twist and set it back down.

If you had a fancy car it had a clock with a stem as well, but it never worked right from the start, so you could ignore it. If your fancy stove had a clock, it stopped working the same week that your car's did.

Tonight, I will reset just one clock – the digital clock-radio by the bed. It's the only one that directly impacts my life. However, the clocks in my cars, on the microwave, TVs, DVD player, coffeemaker, stove, plus five wristwatches will stay the way they are.

There are two types of clocks at our house - ones that are right and ones that are irritating. There are way more of the latter than the former.

Unfortunately, it's easier for me to remember that a clock is wrong than try to figure out how to change it. I have a sports watch with four buttons, two of which have to be depressed simultaneously (only if it's in the right mode) for anything good to happen. I don't know which two - the instructions are long gone.

If I sit and play with it long enough, I'll eventually stumble across the right combination. Even then, the numbers fly by so fast I have no hope of stopping it at the right time and have to cycle through 24 more hours to have another shot at it. I've played video games that are easier to beat.

The clock-radio in my car has way more buttons than the sports watch, so it's the last one I wrestle with. It's important to me that my car's clock agrees with the bank clock signs I drive by every day, so I wait until I happen to drive by two banks that agree with each other. I figure that's a sign from God, so I pull over and set my clock (after I dig the manual out of the glove box) then and there.

It would be so much easier if all clocks were smart enough to self-adjust. I finally bought a clock last year that receives radio signals from somewhere (outer space?) and is always exact, down to a thousandth of a second. Nobody really needs this kind of precision, but it's nice to have one thing in your life you can always rely on.

Of course my problems with DST pale in comparison to Amtrak's. When the clocks fall back one hour in November, all Amtrak trains in the U.S. that are running on time will stop at 2:00 a.m. and wait one hour before starting up again. Overnight passengers with insomnia will be surprised to find their train at a dead stop and their travel time an hour longer than they expected. Tonight, their trains instantaneously will become an hour behind schedule at 2:00 a.m. and will have to throw a few extra logs in the boiler to try and make up the time.

I suppose clock-setting would have a higher priority at our house if I thought LuAnn ever actually looked at one. Her ability to arrive anywhere on time seems to be dependent on astounding good fortune and other factors entirely outside the realm of human influence. To her, time is an abstract concept, of little use except when baking.

In addition to the clock resetting aspect, I also object to DST because LuAnn has an extensive flower garden. As long as it's light outside, LuAnn says there's work to be done. Dirty work. I have tried to assert my manhood (ha!) and limit my servitude to a specific time frame, but it doesn't seem to work that way. Call me Mr. Noodlespine.

Last year, I summoned my atrophied religious skills and prayed to hasten the day in the fall when we would finally fall back and lose an hour of daylight, thereby knocking an hour off my gardening time. That same day,

LuAnn came home with a couple of battery-operated LED headlamps designed for rock climbers (!).

If you are traveling down Seventh Avenue in Iowa City after dark this fall and see a bobbing headlamp, please honk your horn sympathetically at Mr. Noodlespine.