

Reptiles Unite!

By

Dorothy Rosby

My son calls me a reptile. It's an affectionate term. Sort of. It's not a reptile's scaly skin that reminds him of me--though my skin can be kind of scaly sometimes. It's not the way reptiles lie on a rock in the hot sun all day either. I prefer the couch.

No, it's the fact that reptiles are "cold blooded" or as scientists call it, poikilothermic, which I think sounds more glamorous. You mammals are homeothermic, meaning you have a constant body temperature. I cannot imagine what that must be like. I put on my mittens to come into air conditioned buildings.

It's 81 degrees outdoors right now. But I'm indoors sitting in my arctic basement, so I'm wrapped in a cozy study blanket—the kind you zip up around yourself like a burrito wrapper. It's the next best thing to actually having a burrito.

I know there are other reptiles out there. I'm not the only shopper who wears a parka to the grocery store in July. People like me listen to the weather report every day, knowing that it doesn't really matter what the temperature is going to be outside, it matters what the temperature is going to be inside. That's where we'll probably be most of the day--unless we can convince our employers that we have an important meeting in the park.

A useful weather report for us would read like this: "It will be sunny and 96 degrees outdoors today. But bring your jacket if you're having lunch at Madge's Family Restaurant, where it will be around 60 degrees. Not only is Madge a woman of a certain age, she knows the cooler she keeps the customers, the more likely they are to order

dessert after dinner. As you know, eating dessert is nothing more than the body's attempt to put on insulation. And you know what they say: If you can't stand the heat, get out of the kitchen--and go to the movies. It will be 40-45 degrees at the movie theatre this evening. Your popcorn won't stay hot long, but the ice in your beverage should last until the movie is over."

I can't speak for other reptiles, but I think an indoor temperature of 78 is quite comfortable, unless I'm moving around a lot, which I seldom am. What I'd spend heating the house in the winter, I could save on air conditioning costs all summer—if I didn't live with mammals.

When I travel with my husband and son, the ice men, I have to wear long pants and a sweatshirt no matter what the temperature is outside the vehicle. People in tank tops look at me funny. They think they're tough because they can tolerate an air conditioner blasting on them. But I think I'm pretty tough; I don't even complain when the air conditioning goes out. Of course, sometimes I complain when it comes back on.

Despite the discomfort, the goose bumps, and the contempt of the warm blooded that we must endure, most reptiles would agree; we feel lucky to be as cool as cucumbers. I'd even go so far as to say, the mammals in our life wish they could be like us. After all, it is better to have blue lips than a damp, red face. It's better to give the old, cold shoulder than be hot under the collar all day. And, as they're so fond of telling us, we can always put on a sweater. Very true. And I'd rather wear a sweater than BE a sweater.

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