

My basement has turned into an air conditioner museum

By Dave Rattigan

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Welcome to air conditioner season, when the temperature rises to the point where you realize that you should have bought a new unit last fall, when they cost less and were actually available on store shelves.

Instead, you make a hopeful run to Home Depot to stand elbow to elbow with other sweaty procrastinators, staring at empty palettes, waiting for the next shipment.

Or maybe you're like my wife and me. We have an air conditioner collection. It's in our basement.

They are window units of all sizes, new and antique. Some are pristinely clean, and others have filters loaded with dust mites, black mold spores, and centipedes.

There is the little one, which has been through so many apartment moves it resembles the pace car at a demolition derby. There's one from our apartment in New York, and two more from the next apartment, an open space that demanded heavy Btus on both floors.

The remaining two come from I-don't-remember. My best guess is that I have been dragging one from basement to basement since the dissolution of my first marriage, when she dropped it out the second-floor window but missed me, though not necessarily on purpose.

The other might have come from the side of the road, picked up because on that particular day I'd deluded myself into thinking that just because something was left out as trash didn't mean there was anything wrong with it. (And just because a guy can't operate a screwdriver doesn't mean he can't learn appliance repair.)

Those are just the units in the basement, not the ones we're using.

We did own the previously mentioned big, quiet \$550 mega-Btu air conditioners, but when we bought the house and then paid for new electric wiring and windows, the only outlets left with old electric wires, by coincidence, were under the two big windows.

So those stayed in storage, and I was determined to save the ozone layer – until the first heat wave, when I picked up some milk, eggs, coffee, and two \$100 air conditioners at that home goods emporium, Stop & Shop.

A few other air conditioners have come and gone from my life, brought in by a roommate or picked up in a buddy's move. Because that's the way it goes for an air conditioner.

Once out of the box, it will travel from home to home, a useful tool or storage item, its fate determined by the shape of your windows. The life of an air conditioner would make an excellent Pixar movie.

And then there's Craig's List, which is to air conditioners what eHarmony is to spinsters and guys who live with their mom.

Actually, as I think of it, this would make an excellent Pixar movie. The protagonist, played by Tom Hanks, could be a rugged old unit left on the sidewalk by the moving men. He befriends a refrigerator with no

door, played by Whoopi Goldberg.

This could be a stroke of brilliance. Or maybe it's just the heat.

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