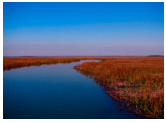


Tybee Island: The Great Escape(s)

Written by Mark Shaffer

Wednesday, 25 November 2009 05:59

I am running through the wilds of Tybee Island in the dark shouting in vain for a dog that has yet to really respond to this new name. He is a small dog and it's very dark.



Naturally, I have no flashlight and the only contact number on his collar tag is my wife's cell phone, which (of course) is sitting on a coffee table back in Beaufort. (*Mental note: add the other number to the tag and attach it to a GPS collar.*

) I'm running through what used to be the Fort Screven parade grounds wondering just how this happened, which direction he's likely to have run, how far he's gotten, if he's okay, *and what the hell did I just step in?*

Did I mention this is our wedding anniversary? But I digress...

This all begins innocently enough (as these things often do) with a good deed and a whim. The good deed is a thirteen-pound Jack Russell/Shih Tzu mix (we think) with a snaggle-toothed mug reminiscent of a fuzzy canine version of a [James Cagney](#) or maybe one of those [Lollipop Guild guys](#)

from

The Wizard of Oz

. My softhearted wife, Susan, takes him in temporarily as a favor to a neighbor. The "temporarily" part soon turns to something like "until we find him a good home."

Plus the little guy comes with a double whammy: a serious case of separation anxiety and mad skills as an escape artist. Nevertheless, the reigning queen of the household, our Miniature Schnauzer, Scout, seems to think the addition a fine idea. Now, she has something other than us to terrorize. We dub him "Ollie" after Dickens'

[Oliver Twist](#)

, a fitting reference to his history and circumstances. Or so we think.

And so chaos and stress ensue, some of it Ollie-related, some of it the pure coincidence of life. As our anniversary approaches, it is apparent – at least to Susan – that we need a break, a change of scenery. We have to get the hell out of town. Just one problem – actually two problems – what to do with the dogs? They're beginning to bond pretty well and boarding them at the last minute is not an option. On a last ditch whim Susan finds the answer online: a [dog friendly bed and breakfast](#)

on a nearby island neither one of us has managed to set foot on before. Perfect.

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[Tybee Island](#) is to Savannah what Sullivan's Island once was to Charleston – an oddball mix of resort and residential, townies and tourists, with plenty of sand, surf, history and nature all moving at a different pace. Georgia's northernmost [Barrier Island](#) sits at the mouth of the Savannah River, a short boat ride due south of Hilton Head, a bit longer drive for landlubbers from Beaufort. Despite a brief directional miscue in Savannah (something of a personal tradition), the drive takes about ninety minutes this fall morning. In fact, it's less stressful than the average trip to the outer reaches of Hilton Head Island (which I prefer to call *Death Race 2009* or "William Hilton's Revenge"). Tybee's about 20 miles east of the city on US-80, the final miles seem to float past over a narrow strip of asphalt with marsh in every direction.

On Cockspur Island, just before Tybee, sits a unique, living piece of American history, a pentagonal monument to the end of one era and the beginning of another. [Fort Pulaski](#) bears the name of a Polish nobleman and soldier who fought for George Washington during the American Revolution. The fort is finally finished in 1847 after eighteen years of construction, twenty five million bricks and a cost of a million dollars – an astronomical figure for the day.

The eleven-foot thick walls are thought to be virtually invincible. The mere notion seems to tempt fate.

What took nearly two decades to render, takes less than two days to rend asunder. In April 1862, Union forces firing highly accurate – and brand new – rifled artillery from Tybee Island need just thirty hours to blast the Confederate fortress into submission. The occupying Union force of a thousand men will spend their first six weeks repairing the major damage and breaches. The outer walls remain pockmarked with scars of the brief but horrific siege. The sudden fall of Pulaski marks the last time any such military installation is built of brick in the United States.

Now a National Monument under the auspices of the [National Park Service](#), Fort Pulaski draws Civil War buffs, ghost hunters (it's reportedly haunted by a number of Confederate specters), photographers and nature lovers. The surrounding habitat is home to nearly a dozen [Protected Species](#) including the American oystercatcher, bald eagle, loggerhead sea turtle, and manatee. Alligators ripple the glassy water of the old moat like silent nightmares.

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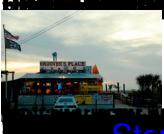
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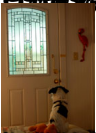
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