

Keep On Truckin' (Especially When Wet)

Written by Jack Sparacino

Tuesday, 19 September 2017 16:11

"Anyone who says



they're not afraid at the time of a hurricane is either a fool or a liar, or a little bit of both." - Anderson Cooper, CNN

Safe and sound once again, our third evacuation is now safely receding in the rear view mirror. We survived another trip to Augusta, having been urged out of town by Aunt Irma. Fittingly, her worst day for us Lowcountry denizens was 9/11. It's hard to believe that the original - and infinitely worse - horror was sixteen years ago. Perhaps it's time to finally toss out the comfort foods we bought then to help us through the stress (goodbye, vintage Chunky Monkey and pimento cheese spread!).

What a good excuse to shove aside my wonky, researchy self and simply reflect on our days of upheaval. Given our luxurious accommodations, it wasn't like reliving the pioneer days or simulating Navy SEAL training. Nor was it a straight up vacation. Sort of in the middle somewhere. Like watching a baseball game on a 55" screen with a wider selection of beer than you usually find at the ballpark. Midway between listening to the game on the radio and having box seats.

Getting out of the house was easier this time, having "just" gone through Matthew not quite a year ago. We used the same Marriott in Augusta, the same luggage, the same maps. Not the same car, though . . . Jane's new A6 beckoned, and with some fine Sinatra and Landreth cd's off we went.

Veering away from the TripTik planner, we got off 278 (well past nice little ole sleepy Varnville, at least) and went up 125. The sign said Augusta and 125 was clearly shown on the map so why not? OK I'll tell you . . . stay off 125 unless you need a good Twilight Zone-y smack in the

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head. We had the navigation screen up and sure enough, there is nothing there for what, 50 miles? Kinda spooky. No homes, no gas stations or other businesses; no farms, no billboards, no state parks. No nuthin' and it just goes and goes. Heaven help you if you have a breakdown or really need a rest stop (ok, sure there are all those nice big trees). Perhaps somebody (if they're not too *busy* trying to stay awake) could put up a warning sign. They might be inspired by an early 1800's stationary header: "P.F. Collier & Son, Publishers of Good Books." Something like "Welcome to Nowheresville, We'd Ask you to Come Back Soon But We Ain't Sure Where We's At Either." Truth in advertising.

We'll be a sport and let them gloss over the fact that the whole area is wall to wall bugs, as witnessed by the entire front of our nice new car being tattooed with them . . .
yeeeeeeickkkkkkkkk.

[Quick aside: maybe Congress could consult this playbook. Their decision making is so screwed up and illogical they might use stationary that plays up the fact that only three of them have a science background. (Yup, better than none, podner.)]

There were so many smashed bugs (*loveus maximes obnoxum*) that the hotel staff commented on them ("hey wadda mess") before parking us in their garage. But as usual all staff were most kind and courteous. Yes, this might be interpreted coldly as a ploy directed at gaining higher tips, but warmth is a hard bit of forgery. Several of them recognized us from the Matthew evacuation, including Misty in housekeeping. Gerald jumped on his phone, eager to show us pictures of his new dog. Just following many folks' advice, we did indeed have a blessed day.

Speaking of dogs (were we?), I leaned initially toward thinking there must be a dog show or conference underway. All around the hotel and grounds we saw every breed and mix ever conceived. This included an "Irish blue terrier" which seemed intent on meeting and greeting everyone in sight. A visit to the weekly Augusta Market extended the dog show, including several pit bulls. As our girls (Yorkies) are small by design, I kept them at a safe distance. In one case, a very young woman had two of these sturdy specimens on leashes. The weather was still lovely and they appeared well behaved, at least from 15-20 feet away. That said, it seemed fortunate that my half eaten sandwich from lunch remained back in our room and I had forgone my pulled pork aftershave that morning.

Yes, I'm habitually wary of larger dogs when our larger creampuff is only 12 pounds. So I

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stayed in character when a nice young couple offered us a ride on their elevator car and I declined. Their Dalmatian was a bridge just a bit too far in close quarters (or silver dollars). Sorry, Dorothy . . . ah, Dot.

It was just a good week for critters. The 9/10 issue of the *Augusta Chronicle* claimed that "the animal shelter at the fairgrounds remains open, as well as the horse shelter at the [brace yourself] Hippodrome." Sadly, I can't speak about the "Quackerdrome" despite the brace (squadron?) of 19 ducks we spotted paddling about in the Savannah River. On this day, my l'orange body wash didn't seem to create any special problems. Had it done so, I suppose we could have put any damages on my "bill."

Hurricane Harvey department: shortly after spotting the ducks, I passed an older fellow who exchanged greetings with me from his park bench. He informed me that he was "homeless." Ever quick on my feet, I responded "are you really?" He said yes and mumbled something about needing cash. By sheer luck, I had chosen to bring a \$10 bill with me on the walk. Nothing else except Dixie, Lady and room key. I happily gave him the ten, said have a nice day, and wandered off. I'd like to *think* I would have given him whatever bills I had on me. I *know* he made my day and I wish him well.

I also know I'm no hero. Back in our room, reading Marcus Luttrell's inspiring book about serving as a Navy SEAL, I could only fantasize:

"We backed to the side of the hull and pulled, dragging the IBS [inflatable boat, small] upright, flipping it back on its lines. Everyone was aware that the tide was sweeping us back into the breakers. Feeling something between panic and frenzy, we battled back, grabbed our paddles and hauled out into flatter water and took a bead on the finish line. We paddled like hell, racing toward the mark, some tower on the beach. Then we dumped the boat again, grabbed the handles, carried through the shallows onto the beach, and hauled it into a head carry." *Ã* *Â*
Marcus Luttrell,
Lone Survivor
(2007, Little, Brown)

Reading a neighbor's charming hurricane e-mail further helped put this trip in perspective, as she noted that "4 otters just swam by the back yard." Yeah, that's me, goofing off again staring at the sky, wondering what's looking good for dinner. And debating whether ten bucks can get you something decent to eat in this neighborhood.

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I'm thinking - and hoping - yes. If we can make the best of a terrible weather event, definitely yes.