

Comin' or Goin'

By Jim Turner

The walk from the family room to the master bedroom took only a few seconds. Yet when I arrived at that strange place, I hesitated and gazed around, overcome with confusion, then turned and retraced my steps back to the place I started. Why the dickens had I gone into the other room?

Back in the family room, I could reboot my brain and write a note on my hand for the second try at the bedroom adventure. This is not a new experience for me. "Why did I come in here, Skip?" my mother asked me many times in her older years. (FYI: my childhood nickname was Skip, and many family members call me that to this day.)

"Why did Eva Mae think I knew the answer?" I asked myself over and over again. Recalling the experience is not quite as funny now as when I was an observer instead of the victim—not so funny now that it is happening to me on a regular basis. My mother used to tell me she had an illness called CRS. "Can't remember stuff," she'd say. The truth is "stuff" was a word that played prominently in her part-German, part-English slang. Even as a youngster, the translations were pretty simple to follow.

For some time, I have worried that there might be a genetic connection to this CRS thing. My older brother tells me there is no cause for concern since he has very vivid memories of the day Willie and Eva Mae accepted me from some gypsies traveling through Henderson. According to his memory, the gypsies offered the two Turners a milk goat and three laying chickens. They promised to return for the baby, but the livestock could stay on. To this day my brother is still hopeful they will return. Maybe because of this story I have long been curious about my ancestry and have toyed with the idea of buying one of those miracle test kits advertised on TV.

The Greek god of storms, Aeolus, and those gypsies must have remembered that I had a birthday last month. In celebration of my Labor Day birth, Aeolus created and delivered to me a lovely hurricane named Dorian. What Dorian didn't expect was that my tenacious family in New Bern would demand we seek shelter in their home as the big guy pointed toward Atlantic Beach. So we spent the night of September 5 in New Bern with our daughter and grandchildren and missed much of the action that had been planned for me at the coast. Sometime during the early morning hours the power in New Bern took a break. When the household came out of hiding, all of us counted fingers and toes and declared ourselves safe. Who cares about HVAC when all the body parts are accounted for and all are in good working order? Greek gods don't know about gas ranges and French press coffee makers. My family does, though, and they soon cooked up eggs, bacon and homemade blueberry pancakes. My pancake was served with a lighted birthday candle. Nice try, Dorian, but love and determination owned the day. Happy birthday to me!

On my birthday 23 years ago in 1966, Aeolus treated me to Hurricane Fran. At that time we lived in the Willowhaven community in Durham on a one-acre wooded lot surrounded by a mixture of tall pines and old, stately maples and oaks. As I recall it, this hurricane gift was a bit of a surprise for the Piedmont area. Fran did not have GPS to guide her when she slipped into Wilmington, shook her tangled hair a few times, made some pretty good NFL jukes and eventually headed for Inverness Drive in the northern part of town. Our dear friend Beverly from Richmond had driven down to help celebrate the event and learned too late that Fran was also coming to visit. Jean watched the show throughout the night from a large bay window in our family room as the trees bent near the ground before rising again. Bev and I had a nightcap or three and managed to doze for most of the show.

When daylight found its way up our hill, I was shocked by the sight. We later counted 26 lost trees that had perished just on our property alone, though many were small. The street behind us was not so fortunate. Two houses had been blown off their foundations and were later condemned. Others had trees on or through roofs as well

as the other normal storm damages we are accustomed to seeing here in coastal North Carolina. We were very fortunate to have avoided any major problems. In short order, neighbors were helping each other, and the air was filled with the songs of chain saws.

Dorian was not as powerful as Fran by the time it skimmed our coast. He certainly was not able to foil my birthday breakfast with the pancakes and candles, birthday cards and gifts. My favorite gift, an ancestry kit, was from Jean. I think she has been listening to my brother and wants some clarity on this gypsy theory.

Early Friday afternoon after the power woke up, we loaded up and left New Bern for Chapel Hill, where we would stay till Sunday afternoon. By Sunday morning I was anxious to get back home to investigate the ancestry box. I read the instructions, then I read them again; I was determined to get this done right.

There were not many breakable or losable parts to worry about. There were two swabs individually sealed like Band-Aids, two small glass vials, a miniature plastic zipper bag and a small page of instructions. I was expected to remove the two swabs from their coverings and set aside. I was to use one to swab the inside of my right cheek for 30 seconds and repeat the process in my left cheek with the remaining swab—and place each in the vials provided. That should be easy. "Psst," said the little guy on my left shoulder. "Want to have some fun? How about if you use one of those little swabs on Oscar? Wouldn't that be a hoot?" In case you don't remember him, Oscar is my grand dog who lives in New Bern. I laughed out loud at the thought and earned an inquisitive look from Jean. That's when the powerful roundhouse punch hit me in the right ear and the Miss Goodie Two Shoes who rides around on my right shoulder said, "Are you stupid? You want to find out if you're a gypsy or a miniature Schnauzer? You schmuck! You can have a laugh now or prove your brother is a liar. What do you want to do here?"

Once again, the feminine logic prevailed. Two swabs are on the way to the lab, and in about eight weeks I will know the truth. I am reminded of a line from a Jack Nicholson movie when he said to the prosecutor, "You want the truth? You can't handle the truth!" We'll see.



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