

GNO

By Jim Turner

The voices wafted up the stairs like the smells from Grandma's kitchen, and they were as pleasant to my ears as Grandma's fried chicken was to my nose. The different pitches and notes wavered and fluttered as bursts of laughter interrupted the conversation. These were the sounds of friendship, the expressions of 16 different ladies enjoying each other's company and celebrating their monthly respite from all things male. This was Girls Night Out. It was the December meeting, only a couple weeks before Christmas, and the venue was our home in Pine Knoll Shores. It was impossible not to smile as I stole away to my escape on the second floor. Listening, I struggled to put faces with voices, but I was taking mental notes, even though I promised to close my door and become invisible.

There are back-stories and history to explain how these ladies found each other and how their friendships were forged, but I can mostly only speculate. They share common church affiliations, book clubs, bridge clubs and country clubs. There are a multitude of volunteer opportunities and social events happening on and off this skinny little island, and the combination of all these goings on, when stirred and blended among the relatively small permanent population, is sure to bring us face to face often. Acquaintances become teammates in some ways and competitors in others. For some unexplained reason it seems that women are far more adept and at ease with the art of making friends than are men. That is a trait that defies logic, though I admit that I am usually slow to form friendship bonds and even less likely to become part of a larger group.

What is difficult for me and many guys is just a walk in the park for women in general. It seems crazy to me that someone might say, "Will you look at that dress? Where on earth did she find that thing, and what possessed her to wear it in public?" And, no sooner has that been said than the speaker will complement the wearer of the sexy red dress, the outfit with conservative use of fabric. Men just don't do that. We would never comment about a friend who wears a sexy red dress, even if the friend is a man.

Oops. I got off track somehow. I was telling you about Girls Night Out in December and how I stayed busy on the phone answering numerous calls from disturbed neighbors. In the end, all turned out well.

A shroud of mystique surrounds the GNO group. I have tried lots of times to get to the foundation of the organization but when I ask a question of one of the members, the subject touches one of their hot buttons, and I am rewarded with a blank stare. I find this a bit scary. I have jokingly mentioned to some of them that there might be a secret handshake or maybe a cute little Irish jig—and again with the blank stare. I have thought the unspoken response might be, "I can tell you, but . . ."

My journalism instincts (aka being nosy) refuse to allow me to leave it alone. I will continue to try to break the story of the bunch, and I happily report that I have made some progress. Here is what I think I know so far.

The gang fluctuates from 15 to 20, with the exact count being dependent on whether someone found a black marble on their dinner plate. The marble has proved to be less messy than a horse head and a bit easier to slip into a restaurant. Regardless of ease and neatness, the message it delivers is the same:

"Your presence is no longer appreciated." I have not verified this fact with three sources, but the information originates from a reliable unnamed mystery person.

Anyhow, of those remaining diners who are without marble, someone will suggest or determine the following month's venue, date and time. Once this is set, the appointed member will make arrangements. Fortunately for the group, there are still a few local restaurants that will agree to schedule reservations for the gathering. I have heard that some eateries require a deposit against potential property damage, but apparently crowd noise is of no concern to the ownership, and many managers feel that extra sound just means it is a happening place.

To continue, the member-in-charge for a particular month gets to plan the program for the evening. Well, perhaps calling it a program is a bit too formal. The M-I-C is expected to introduce some funky activity that will require additional beverage consumption and will stimulate greater levels of noise from all involved. Through an unnamed source I have learned that one favorite "game" the ladies play is an R-rated version of charades that was born from my favorite scene in the movie "When Harry Met Sally." You'll remember if you give a minute's thought to it. The scene takes place in a restaurant where . . . oh, never mind. It was all done in friendship and innocence and just to have one more glass of grog.

Some who read this might sense some sour grapes and maybe some jealousy on my part. To you I say, "Don't cry for me, Argentina or Canada or Havelock." Sometimes when the girls are out and being rowdy, some of the guys get together at the Monkey Bar. Other times we just stay alone in our own spaces and struggle through three or four hours without hearing the word "don't" or without being told to clean that up and put that away because it is not healthy. On those nights I have been known to grill a fat steak, bake a potato and serve myself without anything green to disturb the plate. Other times I might go for broke with a fried Spam sandwich on white bread with mustard and a side of pork rinds. I am not a drinker, but I might even have a second diet coke just for good measure.

Just to be clear on the recent gathering, you all didn't really believe your Christmas finery and good cheer would go unnoticed and unreported did you? If you feel I have been unfair or have misrepresented something, please have a word with my friend and bodyguard, Bubba "Bone Breaker" Jackson. More importantly, please feel free to come back again to enjoy your night out here. We will leave the light on for you. I will be better prepared next time with a larger plate for my take out and a reliable recorder so I won't miss anything important.



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