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# Hurricane Florence Mandatory Evacuation

Until we heard the words “Mandatory Evacuation” we were planning to stay and weather the storm. Bathtub was filled, jugs of water filled and put in the freezer. batteries, flashlights, non-perishable food piled high. As predictions raised the hurricane threat to Category 4 targeting our own North Carolina Coast and mandatory evacuation was declared, we devised a safer alternative. My daughter’s lake house in Georgia would be available. She graciously offered it to us and our toy poodle, Skippy. She also offered it to her father (my ex-husband) his wife and their two Maltese pups. We all would share the accommodations (without television) for the undoubtedly brief duration of exile. I realize this is beginning to sound like a mandatory group therapy session complete with three barking pooches, but “any port in a storm.” This was mandatory evacuation, period.

Let me explain. Our first marriage had dissolved decades ago and each of us had embraced a newer, solid, blissful marriage tested by decades of life. Events and activities concerning children and grandchildren continued to connect us to our past. However, sharing our living quarters for an indeterminable amount of time was an impending challenge. Lots of water under the bridge, so to speak. But we are adults, after all.

The dogs, so cute, white and fluffy, began barking their heads off for the first twenty-four hours, not quite so cute. Although we had no television, we did have Internet connection.

The two brides hovered over our devices and barked the latest facebook posts amid the chorus of canines. Grateful for eye-witness reports on Facebook, various weather websites, and local news reports, we called out latest bits of information. Town Manager, Scott Chase, and Mayor, John Davis, faithfully posted information and advisories. We were concerned to follow each mention of our beloved coastal communities and the people, homes and businesses under siege. Our town was on our minds as we waited in comfort, but unable to enjoy that comfort. We read aloud phrases and headlines across the room all day long, day by day. We had nothing else to do. It consumed us.

I failed to mention that our spouses were, not only computer-phobic, they were both extremely hard of hearing. This meant that each announcement was met with “What?” And then they were repeated, but with a closely-rhyming counter-announcement. Close in sound, but totally “alternative facts.” Rain accumulation measurements, tree down reports, roof exposures, rising flood waters were somberly shared and prayed over. Alternative misinformation was repeated slightly distorted with equally distorted response. Ending with, “Why is Peter is going hunting?!” It is a terrible and embarrassing thing to be hearing such dreadful news and succumbing to uncontrollable laughter at miscommunications. Comic relief was a release to our tension.

As the days ebbed and flowed, the dogs adjusted and joined the team effort. walking as a triple drive team of marshmallows. We spouses and ex-spouses

worked together preparing meals, feeding the dogs, and hovering over our devices.

By the fourth day, a trip in search of a bookstore was mandatory. We needed another focus. My husband and I overdid our purchase by tripling previous bookstore purchases. Books are the answer. I told the saleslady we might be back.

As the storm itself waned, floods and rivers rose, dams breeched and roads, including Interstates, closed. Our homes seemed even more remote and unreachable. Reports from the “stayputters” in our neighborhoods assured us that our houses were unscathed but unreachable. We adjusted our expectation for early return to the coast. We curled up with a good book or two.

In the last days of our exile, we read less and talked more. We shared common memories of child-raising and family vacations, and related what had transpired in the years since and stories about our spouses lives that were new to hear. Good memories only, good laughs, good smiles.

Through it all we appreciated Frank Tursi’s Florence Chronicles on Facebook as accurate hometown reporting. Finally he reported a NCDOT safe return path home. Twelve days away from our homes in peril were enough. We scooped up our belongings, our pooches and leftover food, piled into our respective vehicles and traveled in tandem home to rebuild our damaged property as we had repaired our damaged past. We are adults after all.