

Life Experiences



"Hurricane Hazel"

By Brenda Loy Wilson

HURRICANE HAZEL

Nine years old

On October 14, 1954, the US Weather Bureau, now the National Weather Service, reported that Hurricane Hazel had intensified into a Category 4 storm with maximum winds of 135 miles per hour. It was predicted to be the deadliest storm of the season. Landfall occurred with an eye that was 40 miles wide, a central pressure of 938 millibars, the lowest reported in a hurricane to ravage our state so far. Hazel hit the North Carolina/South Carolina border, between Myrtle Beach and Calabash, with winds up to 150 mph. A storm surge as high as 18 feet coincided with lunar high tide. Massive flooding washed out bridges and over 11 inches of rain fell in some areas of the state.

Citizens were warned to seek shelter from powerful winds, flying debris. Hazel moved inland rapidly and wreaked havoc, cut wide paths of devastation. Tall pines sougged, scraped together; some bore down, nearly touching the ground. Saplings formed perfect arches. Wind speeds increased, emitted sounds like a freight train barreling through a tunnel.

While other people in the state hunkered down, Daddy, my brother and sisters and I were tying leaves of tobacco onto wooden sticks to hang up into the barn to cure. The man hanging the five to six hundred sticks had to be extra careful as he stood on the wooden tier poles and reached up to the rafters.

We all worked as quickly as humanly possible. Wet hair clung to our faces; we'd shake our head to loosen the wet strands that covered our eyes. That was an action we repeated over and over. Our noses dripped as though we suffered severe head colds or full-blown fall allergies. Garments clung to our bodies in need of being fed through the wringer washer that Mama used on the back porch.

Hurricane Hazel – 2

Daddy would not let any of the family leave until the job was complete. Most of the hired workers left before all the sticks of tobacco reached the safety of the barn.

This experience was such a contrast to the night when I was six and Daddy let me spend the night at the barn while he stoked the wood-burning furnace made of rocks and daubing dirt. It was imperative that he keep the fire to a precise temperature so that the leaves would cure golden. Of course, he didn't sleep much.

For supper, he'd roasted ears of corn in their shucks, baked potato and cut up a cantaloupe from the garden. Even before dark, I climbed into the narrow tobacco sled and laid on the homemade quilts. The sides were made of burlap and stained with the juice of green tobacco leaves pulled earlier that day. My only fear was that a big green tobacco worm was hiding somewhere inside the sled and would crawl on me during the night. I tried counting stars but there were so many that I fell asleep not long after naming what I believed was the Big Dipper, Little Dipper, and the Milky Way. Had it rained that night I could not have stayed at the barn as Daddy slept on an old car seat under the attached shed. After stacking the wood to keep it dry for the fire, there would have been no room for me.

We finally arrived home in Daddy's pickup truck then raced onto the back porch where Mama waited with towels. Our arrival marked one of the rare times that Mama displayed anger with Daddy. The peacemaker, Mama usually admonished him gently, quietly. Even if that approach made no difference, didn't douse a flicker of his volatility, she tried. His moods could escalate into gale force at the drop of a hat. This time she didn't tiptoe around the matter. She vehemently disagreed with his decision to put the crop, the money, before our safety.

Hurricane Hazel – 3

Mama was angry, frightened for the safety of her family as the eye of Hazel tracked across North Carolina.

Supper that night consisted of heated leftovers. Mama was so out of sorts that she didn't even warm the biscuits left from breakfast. After a silent meal, we listened to radio broadcasts from the local station until a powerful wind took down the tower.

The number of people killed from Hurricane Hazel reached nineteen and several hundred more were injured. The National Guard was mobilized to prevent looting and on October 17, 1954 President Dwight D. Eisenhower declared the Carolinas a major disaster and offered immediate and unlimited federal assistance. Daddy would never entertain assistance of any kind; he was too proud and believed that a real man took care of his own, even during a hurricane.

The tobacco barn's thick logs with extra chinking withstood the winds and rain.

Life Experiences



"Grandma's House"

By Genny Dickson

GRANDMA'S HOUSE

It was in the years of the Great Depression of the 1930's that an immigrant's family's life was disrupted by a great catastrophe. It would be an event that still baffles her family to this day long after her passing. There are two versions of the story and it will be up to the reader's choice which story you choose to believe.

In a small town in Western Pennsylvania along the Susquehanna River surrounded by the Appalachian-Allegheny Mountains lived an Italian-American family of seven. There was the mother, father, and five children consisting of three girls and two boys. They lived in a modest house on a hill that was so windy it was called it "Windy Hill." They lived among other Italian immigrants and immigrants of German, Polish, and Irish descent. Everyone got along well in this small town of almost 5,000 people. The family had a grocery store in the front of their house where the mother sold things like canned tomatoes, sauce, candy, and baked goods.

One day the Mafia came to the woman and told her that they were going to burn her house down and collect the insurance money. The woman told the Mafia in Italian to go take a hike. She had a great distain for this organization which followed the immigrants to their new country. The story was told that they burned her house down anyway. Two gentlemen from the house across the street said that all four walls of the house blew out with the walls leaning against the other houses on either side. The wall in the back blew out and fell down the hill and the front wall landed in the street. The house is no longer standing at this present time but a three car garage stands in its place. Some of the adjoining houses still have charred walls from this fire.

The daughter always told the future generations that it was her mother's coal/wood stove that caused the fire. But the two gentlemen told a different version of the same story saying that it was the Mafia that burned it down as they had already imploded 8 similar houses in the area. An interesting observation from these same witnesses said that one relative took everything of value out of the house before the explosion such as pictures on the wall and jewelry. Another interesting fact was that this family left their insurance run out so they were left destitute and the Mafia got nothing. So they moved in with relatives in the area.

Many years have gone by and the two stories of how the fire started were left for posterity to sort out. I am convinced that the Mafia story is true for the woman was my grandmother and the witnesses were my uncles who were the eye witnesses who lived in my great-grandparents house. Since then other uncles from the area have told the same Mafia story. Since it is part of my memoirs, I will leave it to future generations to believe the daughter's version, who was my mother, or the uncles. It was the night that my grandparents' American Dream went up in smoke. I often wondered how my Gram felt after all her hard work coming to this country when she was four years old and working doing menial jobs, even having her own boarding house at one time. My grandparents were very private people that didn't talk much and most of the family has passed so we will never know the mystery of the sudden destruction of my Gram's house.

Life Experiences



"The Broken Toilet Seat"

By John Humphrey

The Broken Toilet Seat

Janet and Chuck were in Wilmington checking on the construction of their new home. Their plan was to come to Burlington and spend some time with us.

But when Joan broke the toilet seat in the big bathroom, I had to take action.

I called Janet with the news and told them the four of us could share the little bathroom. "Not a good idea," she said.

So, because Joan broke the toilet seat, Janet and Chuck got in the car and instead of taking I-40 West, they took I-95 North to Arlington, Virginia.

So, because Joan broke the toilet seat, they could be here having an eggs only breakfast. (I didn't know we were out of grits.)

So, because Joan broke the toilet seat, they are up there in Arlington playing with their grandbaby, Theo.

If Joan hadn't broken the toilet seat, they could be here with us watching Sunday Morning and listening to me cough my brains out. (I've only been doing that a month.)

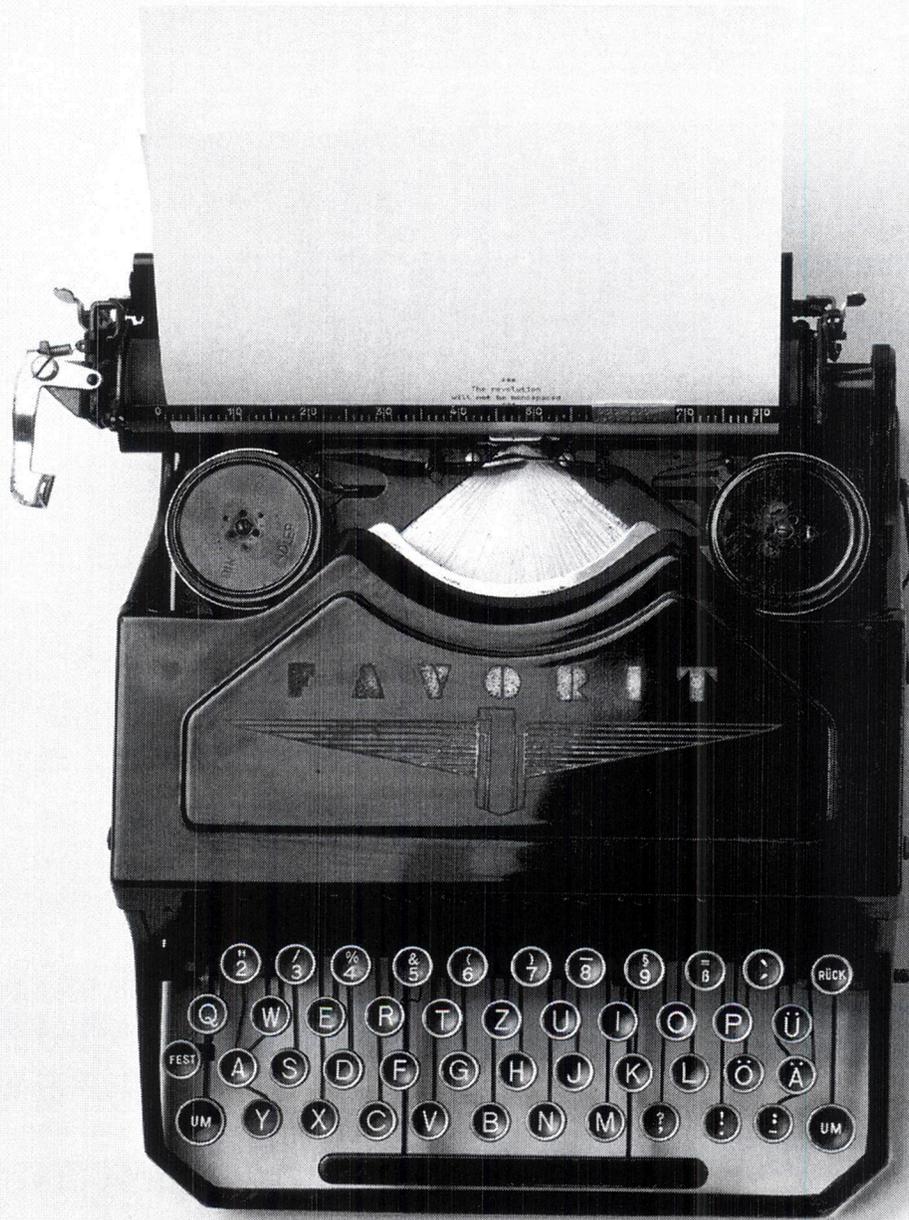
Tony is coming Monday or Tuesday to put the new seat in. Instead of me going to Lowe's giant store and wearing myself out walking around. Did you ever go there and ask directions? They point (aisle 24) half a block away. Then you get there, and that aisle is half a block long. Then you have to stand in line to pay.

I went to Graham Hardware (probably the last hardware store in America.) I asked him if they sold toilet seats. He said, "Aisle 2," (first time he ever said that, but he was waiting on a customer.) I looked about 2 minutes, then he was next to me. "Up by your shoulder," he said.

There it was, in a box with writing on it MADE IN USA. Joan and I have an expression we use when things work out.

We say, "I'm A so Happy."

Life Experiences



"Aging Out!"

By Elizabeth Pennix

Aging Out...

Shall I ignore the obvious signs of aging in my middle years and go into my later years viewing life through rose colored glasses?

Folks, I am now making extreme choices between a pullover shirt versus a button up blouse. What next? I guess I will be choosing whether to continue wearing my fitted slacks instead of a pair of loose fitting pants to hide my "adult underwear".

My dim eyes are better now that I have acquired a pair of bifocals. Which only reminds me of the nice dress shoes with a medium high heel sitting in the corner of my closet that will probably start gathering dust. From now on, it will probably be flats or upscale sneakers as my Sunday best.

My once bi-weekly hair appointments have now become once a month visits to the barbershop for a short trim or buzz cut.

The purse I carry now is much smaller. It's just a tad above a man's wallet to reduce the chance of being left unattended in a grocery cart or pulled off my arm during a mugging.

My twenty year old automobile has been traded in for a four door compact so my aging family and friends don't have to crawl into or struggle to get out of the backseat.

If it's close to lunchtime, I will stop by a family friendly restaurant for a Cobb salad. The meal requirements include shredded lettuce and diced tomatoes. A slow stroll inside and I am on my way.

Since the next stoplight caught me, I peek into my salad and exclaim, "Oh No!" My lettuce is not shredded but large leafy pieces. I realize that the older I get, the more I like "ready to chew" food. Some of you reading this can probably relate. Foods such as: Mashed Potatoes, Baked Fish, Soft Chicken Tenders. It's what I call an easy to chew food group. Lest I forget another requirement before I eat a meal, is a sprinkle of fiber supplement to help me "stay regular".

I am now off to the grocery store in a somber mood. My disappointment is showing because there are fewer coupons to cut out of the Sunday newspaper. Perhaps, I should finally get rid of my flip phone like my niece constantly reminds me and access discount coupons online with a smart phone.

If you are "old school" like me, you still go through the cashier's checkout lane instead of the self-service checkout aisle. As I approach checkout, I see an open lane and think: "Go! Go!" I am within ten feet of the counter. Darn. That young lady just came out of aisle three and is moving at a fast pace straight toward the open checkout lane. My mind says: "you can beat her but my arthritis says: "No way!" I have lost the foot race before the gun went off.

Aging out...

My next stop is the post office and that's a convenient drive up to drop off my bills in an outside mailbox and be on my way. I know exactly how close to pull up so my arm reaches the open slot. No one behind me is going to honk their horn because I miss judged the distance to the mailbox and have to get out of the car.

I finally arrive at home and psyche myself up to get out and walk inside. I do a quick recon of my surroundings to see if any neighbors are out and about. My legs are not in the mood to hold a long conversation while carrying several heavy grocery bags. I make a break for my front door and make it. My brain sighs and says: "Thank God you are home. You can now drink as much liquid refreshment as you want without worrying where the location of a restroom is.

I spot my recliner which is a few feet away and walk toward it. As I start to sit down, my eyes notice the haze of dust on all the knick-knacks sitting around. All of the treasures, I have acquired over the years need cleaning and the groceries also need to be put away.

My recliner will have to wait and I head to the toilet and pick up my cross-word puzzle book. I remind myself that there are many good years ahead and although I am "aging out", it's a new day tomorrow and I am looking forward to each one.