

*"Well I just blew into town about an hour ago; took a look around see which way the wind blows..."*

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So once again, I find myself back in the Lowcountry, a situation I keep repeating about every 3-5 years. This is good; I love the Lowcountry.

It happened pretty quickly, but life has a way of coming at you like that. And when opportunity knocks, you have two choices: open the door or forever wonder what that noise was.

One minute I'm sitting in my office in Camden, a few idle thoughts and what-ifs rattling around the basement gutters of my mind. The next thing I know, I'm sitting in the living room of this old bone of a house in downtown Moncks Corner writing this.

Before anyone says, "What does he mean, 'old bone of a house,' – particularly the owners -- let me say this: it's a way cool place. It's one of those wonderful old Carolina Lowcountry cottages, resplendent with huge rooms, high ceilings, and one of the greatest front porches I've ever seen. But it's an old house, complete with all the charms and foibles old houses possess. It needs a little TLC -- like several weekends' worth of hard labor of the type still legal for married couples to voluntarily undertake but otherwise banned by the Geneva convention -- to make it homey again.

As is pretty much the case in all older homes, one also must get used to other residents-- and by that I mean, "not technically human beings, possibly even ectoplasm." From the chimney swifts to the mysterious footsteps in the night, make no mistake: you are sharing space.

For example, we showed up for our first full weekend here a few days back, armed with mops, buckets, rags, and a whomin' heavy duty vacuum cleaner. We weren't five minutes unpacking when my wife accosted me outside.

"There's a bird in the house," she said.

"Where?" I said.

"It's in the front room. I don't know if it's alive or dead. I touched it, and it didn't move."

I walked into the front room. Sure enough, a dusky little chimney swift was perched on a shutter. My Beloved was right -- you really couldn't tell if it was real, alive and well, real and recently deceased, or possibly something else, like a Christmas ornament no one noticed during the last blitzkrieg of house cleaning.

I donned a pair of rubber gloves, just in case it was real and recently deceased. No reason to skeeve myself out by snatching a dead bird off a window shutter. Confidently, I reached out, my hand gently encircling its tiny body.

The next few moments were chock full of rapidly unfolding surprises. For one, I was surprised out how fast and high my adrenaline and blood pressure could jack in the space of about a second. That's because I was surprised such tiny birds could move so suddenly and violently. It might as well have been a pterodactyl as a chimney swift.

I also was surprised that my wife can shriek louder than a civil defense siren during an atomic attack if she is adequately motivated, such as those occasions when she believes we're being attacked by a pterodactyl.

I also was surprised our dog, the greatest corgi who ever lived, but nonetheless a creature recently described as looking like "a loaf of bread with legs," could move so fast. One minute she was lying on the floor by my wife's feet, her wee bitty legs stretched behind her like furry tailpipes on a dually, the next minute all we saw was a pair of eyes peering from under the sofa across the room, no doubt looking to see where the pterodactyl finally landed.

After some creative swearing, I finally caught the little son of a bachelor, took him to the front porch, and sent him winging into the wild blue yonder.

The next morning we would find him again, this time on a curtain rod in the other front room. After another short chase accompanied by a little more creative swearing, I finally caught and tossed him off the porch again.

Then it finally occurred to me to take a gander up the chimney. Sure enough, I was greeted by agitated wing flutterings and indignant chirps. I told the them I won't come up in the chimney if they won't hang out in the living room. I think it was a good conversation. But just to make sure, I closed the flue.

Darn pterodactyls...