



Of all of the happenings and news that bombarded us over the past few weeks – on the page, via the Web, across our televisions, and over our radio waves – the powerful presence of an extremely high astronomical tide most impressed me. Not only did the vanishings of usually visible marsh hummocks surprise me, but the expansive views from our Woods, McTeer and Bell bridges, mixing water with horizon, left me in awe of the powerful force of nature that envelops the fragile daily life we tend to in our lowcountry.

It was the word “astronomical” that captured my attention, as newscasters reported the conditions and effects to be wary of, in the notable tide. Astronomical characterizes the effects of the moon and sun on the Earth, and a new moon rose on a Monday in June. There are other kinds of tides – atmospheric, earth, and galactic – all very fascinating, but astronomical, defined as inconceivably large or great, seemed to capture the emotions of the other news swirling around us – the uprising in Iran, the betrayal by our governor, the deaths of cultural icons, and our quiet loss of artist Philip Simmons, master blacksmith of Charleston.

Days before the tide crested, in another part of the country, I successfully maneuvered a rental car through New Jersey, New York City, and Long Island, with the relentless guidance of my Garmin GPS. In previous trips to NYC, just walking Times Square, Broadway, and the Avenue of the Americas left me with a great respect for the interplay between taxicabs, pedestrians, delivery trucks, and passenger cars. How they weave over asphalt and concrete, directed by signs and arrows, traffic lights and cops, is a symphony of horns with the choreography of continuous transport. I did not know if I could do it, drive those busy streets, avoid hitting a person or another vehicle, find my way over multi-tiered bridges hoisted above rivers against a skyscraper panorama, but I did. I returned the Hyundai to National car rental, full of gas and unscathed, and rode the bus back to LaGuardia in proud silence, still wet from the same torrential downpour that postponed Day One of the U.S. Open.

I am in New Jersey and New York these days because I am selling polymers in the personal care industry, companies that make shampoos and conditioners, body washes and lotions. This is a huge shift away from my career in industrial chemicals into the consumer marketplace. In this new line of work, my boss often uses the word “fabulous.” It fits. Hair stylists and cosmetologists work to make clients look “fabulous.” Marketers work with formulators to make “fabulous” products. I have latched onto that expression because it is so positive and upbeat. Driving in New York was fabulous and exhausting.

At the end of my trip north, I pulled into my driveway after the ride back from the Savannah airport. The electric opener raised the aluminum garage door as I got out of the car. There to greet me was a small brown frog trying to make his way into the garage. I stopped and put my foot in front of him to block his entrance, steering him back to the grass before he hopped into an abyss of tools, bikes, file cabinets, golf clubs, and a Toyota Highlander. As I paused, I heard the loud chorus of male frogs calling females from the low-lying woods laden in moist patches of marshy puddles surrounding my house. It was such a different sound from the languages of New York. Foreign, yes, but natural and wild. The sound was incredible, astonishing – fabulous.

Considering Words

Written by Vivian Bikulege

Since then my eardrums have been filled with the strains of “Beat It, ” jokes about Argentinean tail, and the low drone of voices in a far off land protesting the outcome of a questionable election. But it is the appearance of the astronomical high tide that haunts me most. I am still not hurricane ready, and the leak in my 4Runner’s sunroof recently provided me an example of just how much damage water and mold can level.

The frogs have quieted down a bit. Maybe a romantic tryst in the gullies filled with summer rain that line my street has satisfied their instinct to procreate in the darkness of a new moon. Certainly, the few that have been squished by automobile tires on the road, or in driveways, have moved on to eternal wetlands. And speaking of heaven, in his article in The Post and Courier, journalist Schuyler Kropf reflected on the eulogy of Philip Simmons as a man who may “one day be called on to repair the gates of heaven....” There is a sound that would be lovely to hear – the meeting of hammer to anvil in the creation of a black iron gate for God by Mr. Simmons.

Astronomical. Fabulous. Words to consider as we ponder the events surrounding our daily lives. Surely nature provides us some insight into our struggles, our mutual existence and death, but it does not dictate the pathways of our culture, morality, or politics. Oftentimes, nature is the innocent bystander in the civilizations we carve.

At the moment I blocked one frog with my foot from entering my garage, saving him, this time, from becoming lost in my clutter and dehydrating, I saw another smaller frog hop in from the other side. I could not get to him before he entered a dark crevice under a plywood pile. I wonder if I will find him, a crunchy shell of what he was, when I finally get around to cleaning out and organizing the garage. It would be fabulous if he found his way out, back to a tepid puddle, in wait for the next notable astronomical tide. Maybe we both have to wait for a new moon to change our current state, to dance our moonwalk, sliding over the debris that remains after a tide subsides and exposes the surface and skin of who we really are.