

Close to Home: The glory of storms

By DAVID CAMPICHE
FOR COAST WEEKEND

The rain fell in torrents, slapping the bare skin on our faces. Cold, wet rivulets leaked through any opening in our rain coats, seeped down the neck and into our shoes until the souls squished.

“This is fun,” said Gina, the partner in crime of my dear friend, Maurizio Paparo, chef extraordinaire from the Excelsior in Eugene.

Fun, I thought, dropping my head as the next volley of wind raced across the top of the North Jetty at Cape Disappointment State Park. This is the mouth of the great Columbia River and a culmination of rip tides, angry dancing clouds and gray torrential water, both ocean and river, and what

falls from the sky.

Fun, as the wind screamed and wept and bullied. Fun, as the wind bludgeoned our bodies.

Years ago, when my children were kids, I would wake them early on the morning of a sou’wester and drive them to the North Jetty, climb up on that rock edifice and marvel at the force of storm and hundred-mile-per-hour winds.

At first, they protested. I showed them how to lean into the wind. I showed them how those powerful gusts would literally hold them up, brace them against falling, even though they leaned into the storm at about a 30-degree angle.

After a few trips, it was the kids who woke me up just after first light, and encouraged me to drive to the long, sturdy jetty. There was excitement in facing down a storm. Excitement in watching Mother Nature display all her might. To dance the devil’s dance.

The big one

In 2007, during our first major hurricane (perhaps the Columbus Day Storm qualified, too, but we weren’t yet familiar with that concept), I stood on the small dock at China Beach and watched wind gusts agitate the tidal waters of Baker’s Bay into a froth. The waves were cresting at nearly 30 feet. Balls of spume resembling gobs of mayonnaise rode the wave tops like rodeo riders on bucking broncos.

It was then that the wind would grab the spume and hurl the drift for hundreds of yards. All that in seconds. Meanwhile, the wind was ripping the shingles and roof off the old sea house that we rent as a B&B.

The word “frantic” comes to mind, but it was



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A watercolor by Eric Wiegardt

simply bigger and more menacing than that.

To some degree, we live in secure castles. Much of the time, we insulate ourselves from the rain and wind. Our homes are heated, and electric lights allow us to move about without fear of bumping into furniture or falling over stools or other impediments. We can sit in a comfortable chair and read a novel. If we travel, our cars are insulated against raging weather, and an umbrella can keep our bodies relatively dry. (Yes, I know that umbrellas aren’t used with great frequency here on the North Coast, but you get the idea.)

Lessons from nature

So, Gina, Maurizio and I walked down onto Benson Beach, then headed north up the fragile sand spit until we were literally soaked to the skin.

Let me tell you: It was a pleasure to turn back with the wind at our backs. Meanwhile, the drama unfolded — ocean and surf and raging skies — and I was so glad that Gina had insisted on our adventure. Here is a toast to strong women.

Back in the cabin with heat churning from the fireplace, we toasted our trek with a good glass of brandy.

We talked about our ancient ancestors living in caves or temporary shelters.

How they struggled to start fires and wrapped themselves in furs, and feared for their lives from the threat of large mastodons or sleek huge cats. Or from other bands of roving Homo sapiens.

Of course, life is not always safe, not a hundred years ago or today. But we can press the 911 buttons on our cell phones and generally receive quick and efficient care. We have wonderful hospitals and schools and universities where hopefully, we can illuminate or heal our souls. Naturally, there are no guarantees. But most of us have freedom of choice, and perhaps that is our greatest gift, though

some decisions are fraught with fear and complications.

Gina reminded me of a greater force than the cell phone. She reminded me that a good pelting of rain is better than six hours of mundane television. This was poetry. This was the indomitable spirit of nature. This was God raging, as God is wont to do, on certain dramatic occasions. Perhaps He (or She, or It) was declaring, “Look at me, you men and woman created in my image. Remember my force. Remember my joy. Remember that she who walks with her face confronting the gale, walks with me! Unabashedly. Boldly and without fear. CW

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