

Blowing Through 2004

Last year, the wind's most obviously memorable deed was the destruction of homes all over our state, Alabama, Grenada, Jamaica, and the Bahamas. But it also lifted the wings of planes so that family could visit together. The wind rushed over the top of our convertible, carried the scent of burning wood, dried wet towels hanging on lines, gathered autumn leaves in great piles, picked up important papers just to make me run down the street, teased the hem of short skirts, knocked off hats, rattled windows, rolled garbage cans down the street, and rustled the pages of my wall calendar. The names of family members marked the calendar like hurricane names. The year is recalled by whether something happened before Elsie's visit, after we saw Mark, Heather & Marlo, or between Frances and Ivan.

We had just moved on the boat full-time about three weeks before Hurricane Charley took aim on the west coast of Florida. What grim luck, we thought, to have a hurricane coming our way when hurricanes so rarely got near Tampa Bay. We did everything we could to make our boat safe, and with a growing nausea we read the evacuation notice taped to the marina office door. We arrived at my dad's house with a car full of enough stuff to survive should the rest of it be blown into the sea. We shared a nice dinner watching the weather on TV and waiting to be hit by the big wind. Anticipating a loss of power, I climbed into a hot bath to soak before going to bed. There in the bath with the wind starting to howl outside, I thought of my beloved *Ellipsis* being beaten irreparably against the dock, or blown into the sea wall, her lines chafed through and severed. Irreplaceable things, like old family photos, were relatively safe in a storage facility inland. I was here safe with my husband and family. But I began to cry. I cried because *Ellipsis* helps me measure the importance of things, and moments, and people. She compels me to consider which of the tempting things at the store are really worth the space and money. She lets me play with the dolphins and soar with the pelicans. In a quiet night time watch, I hear my husband breathing in sleep below, and I have everything I want or need in one small space. *Ellipsis* runs smoothly powered by the invisible force of the gods. She whispers through the sounds of the rigging and the slap of the waves on the hull, "S'OK, S'Alright". When the wind and waves begin to challenge us, I rely on the wisdom of my husband and the strength of *Ellipsis*. After the storm, there will be the most glorious sunset yet, or a pod of dolphins, or a flock of frigate birds glimmering white, fluttering like giant butterflies. And the winds of Hurricane Charley, blowing round in great circles, pushed me to the realization that my life compass is pointing to "E" now – *Ellipsis*.

But it was not just Charley and the threat of losing *Ellipsis* that steered me along this year. When we went trick-or-treating with Jenny, Jason, Oliver, and Ben in Chicago, we were fortunate to have plenty of little things to use to make pirate costumes and a fantastic pirate ship out of a little red wagon with a treasure chest, crow's nest, sail and mast, and anchor. And although all the goodies were lots of fun, it was the joy of a whole family sharing a pirate dream that made the visit so great.

This year, Mark created a sculpture that involved building a tunnel from the front window of his house through to the back door. The pictures that I saw showed a view through the house with just a chandelier hanging down in the middle, a soft orange glow. It makes me think about looking through the accumulation of things to the light in the center of a home. I think Mark had different motivations for his sculpture, but I also think that he's the kind of artist who won't mind that I have my own simple associations for his work.

Playing a new board game with Marlo, Grandpa gets to show off his fishing skill by connecting a magnet on a line with a plastic yellow fish. Or Oliver saying, after a visit to Tampa, "I'll be Grandpa Fuzzy. C'mon, let's go have some fun!"

I tried to help my mom find a pleasant place to live this year. My dad did find a new home, and it became a safe haven for us.

A sad moment for our family this year was the death of Ken's mother, Flora. Everyone did everything possible to make the passing comfortable. Hurricane Ivan tried but failed to prevent us from getting up to Flora's memorial service. Betty, Jessica, Ken, Jenny and I were there with Ken's dad Harold. Flora's ashes were scattered in a beautiful cathedral of pine trees next to the church. It was breezy from the storm but we were protected, the scent of evergreen all around.

Sailing at night on Ellipsis I think about the wind and where it's come from. The red sand of the Sahara desert travels in the wind across the Atlantic Ocean and lands on sailboats in the Caribbean islands. Little bits of things from all over are floating in the air, lifted up and carried, surrounding us all with the traces of what others have done and thought and been. And the wind, enriched, blows on our sails, and pushes us forward.

Wishing you winds that propel you toward peace and happiness in 2005,

Jackie (and Ken)