

*CHANCES AND
CHOICES*

*FURTHER TALES OF
A GENTLE SOUTHERN MAN*

By

JACKIE K COOPER

Southern Charm Press

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FOR GENNA
WHO COMPLETES THE CIRCLE

OTHER BOOKS BY JACKIE K COOPER

**JOURNEY OF A GENTLE SOUTHERN MAN:
REFLECTIONS FROM THE ROAD**

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There is no way to thank each and every person who has helped create this book. And I know going into this that I am leaving someone out. Still I must make an effort to convey my thanks to a variety of people who have given me the support I needed to get this book completed.

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PROLOGUE

In life everything is one of two things – chances or choices. There are those things we choose to do and there are those things that seem to happen to us at random. For example, meeting the girl of your dreams is usually a chance occurrence. Choosing to marry her is a specified choice. Asking some one on a date is a choice while falling in love is a chance. You get the picture?

Now some would say there are no “chance” occurrences in life, but that everything is guided by a Supreme Being. Still being the Baptist/Methodist that I am, I believe in free will or to use my new phrase “chance.” And therefore I believe that some things do just happen to us.

I believe that deciding to have children is a definite choice. The capability is by chance. The sex of the child is definitely by chance. At least so far. And as we go along the journey of our lives we come to crossroads. In some of these decisions we have a choice but with others we just have to put ourselves out there and let chance take our hand.

When we look back at where we have been we see that in some instances we were in the right place at the right time. And in some instances we were in the wrong place at the wrong time. Life takes twists and turns that we all try to control but sometimes can't. We are set off down a road that has many pitfalls and brambles to make our way through. Or just when we think we can't plod through the muck and mire another moment the sun comes out and dries the road and makes it passable once more.

If we could see the future we would make all the right choices, but we don't. That is why chance is so important.

Things that we do are like ripples in a stream. They span out and touch the shore of other people's lives. Whether it be by choice or chance these things do happen. We do cause other lives to alter directions and move in different ways. That is what makes life so great – the not knowing.

I have always seen each day as a chance to have something amazing happen. Something that can come like a bolt out of the blue, can spin you around and leave you breathless. When I think of these “chance” occurrences I usually think of them as being good things. Maybe that is just my old optimistic streak pushing through.

Still the telephone rings and you wonder just who the wonderful person might be with what wonderful news. Or the mail comes and you have a letter from someone that is going to make your life richer and better. A chance is as available as the next second of your life. It does happen that quickly.

As I journey down the road of life I find the excitement builds from day to day. And in the years “1988, thru 1991,” my boys were still young and the chances and choices were running rampant. I hope that in these stories I have included from those years that you too can see what great mysteries there are in life and how much fun it can be to get involved.

Read on and see how chances and choices influenced the journey of a gentle southern man.

JKC

FORWARD

For this book I chose writings from my “journal” during the period 1988 thru 1991. These years were a time of “chances” as my children were getting older and my life was still in a settling down phase. Still mystical magic was in the air and I had adventures that invigorated my life and made each day a miracle. They were ordinary miracles but miracles of enjoyment just the same.

My “journal” filled up quickly during these times and the stories touch my heart when I re-read them over and over again. Now I pass them on to you for your observation and your enjoyment.

CHAPTER ONE

A Wreck Rearranged Priorities

Life does get complicated and complex at times. The every day existence of bills and bothers tends to wear one down. At least it does me. I go in cycles of panicking over money matters. Some days I am immune to debt worries while at other times I am obsessed by the wolf at the door.

Still when I am my most obsessive, and driving my family crazy about the money flow at our house, something comes along to make me rethink my priorities. Last week the reminder came in the form of a damaged car.

To set the record straight let me quickly say that my wife is one of the best drivers in the world. She is careful, cautious and alert. She drives the speed limit and obeys all the rules of the highway. Plus she always uses her seat belt.

Having gotten all that said I will proceed with my story. On the day in question I had come home from work sick with the flu. To help pass the time I decided to update my ledger. I keep a ledger with every entry as to what is spent on finances. I have it broken down by subject matter and cross reference with check numbers and dates. Doesn't everyone?

By the time my wife arrived from work, I was in a snit and a fit. Money was pouring out of our house in a flood of spending. Wasn't anyone else concerned? Was I the

only sane person around? Didn't we have to stock up for the future lean years? Didn't Nostradamus predict an upcoming economic depression?

My wife tried to assuage my fears with calm reassurance but I wasn't buying it. I was determined that money matters were going to take a turn for the better soon.

Failing to get me in a better mood my wife left to get our sons from school. She had only been gone about fifteen minutes when the phone rang. It was her. "I'm alright," she said, "but I have been in a wreck."

Someone had pulled in front of her and caused a collision. Our car was damaged but she wasn't hurt. She had been going the speed limit. She had been wearing her seat belt. She had done everything right.

Aside from her not being hurt there were a million other things to be thankful about. She had been driving the Oldsmobile and not my compact Dodge Colt which she does sometimes drive. She had not yet picked up the boys so they were not in the car with her. Plus if my 15-year-old had been in the car he would have been driving and he surely doesn't need the trauma of a wreck at this young age.

Of course he is the philosophical member of the family. "Look at it this way, Dad," he said, "In a way it is good we have had this wreck. Now we are safe for a while since statistics show the average family has one wreck every five years." My mind must be able to adapt to teenage logic because somehow that did make sense to me.

So now we have the hassle of filing insurance claims, getting a rental car, and all the other headaches that go along with a car wreck even when it is not your fault. But I can handle it. My priorities are back in order.

They say when it rains it pours and money matters had turned into a hurricane for me. But the rainbow that came was the knowledge that personal health and

safety of your family are all that really matter. The things that money can't buy are the things that make life worth living.

Not Everyone Is A True Fan

Insomnia is a funny disease. You may have partial insomnia, sporadic insomnia, or total insomnia. I am the victim of sporadic insomnia. I never know when it is going to hit. It can come at me without warning and leave me lying in my bed reviewing the past week, the past decade, or the sum total of my life.

My wife does not understand insomnia. She says sleeping is simple. You get in bed, you close your eyes, you go to sleep. That is easy for her to say. She has slept through tornadoes in Georgia, hurricanes in Florida, and earthquakes in California. When it is time to sleep, she sleeps.

The only sure cure for my sleeplessness is to sleep in front of a fan. That means an actual fan, situated at bed level, blowing directly on me. My wife does not think that remedy for insomnia is either healthy or sane. We compromised and put in a ceiling fan. It is not the same.

It all started in childhood. Back in those days we did not have air-conditioned houses. We had open windows and electric fans. My own personal fan, bought with love from caring parents, looked like a propeller from a fighter aircraft. You couldn't turn it on high speed and look into the face of its force. Your eyes couldn't take the pressure.

At night when I turned it on me its sound blotted out the outside world and its cooling currents transported me to another time and place. I loved it, I adored it, I

became an addict. If possible I would have stayed in front of that fan and slept 24 hours a day.

During the winters the fan ran on low with its face turned toward the ceiling. It acted as a heat circulator. It wasn't as good as the summer effect but I still had the comfort of the noise and I could get a drift every now and then.

In college the fan drove my roommates crazy. It took three tries before I got one who could abide it. The man was a saint. The previous two had threatened to send me through the fan like a sausage grinder if I didn't come to my senses.

Finally I made it to law school. I was on my own. I had my own apartment. I could run my fan at will. And run it I did – summer and winter, seven days a week, twelve months a year. It purred by my side when I studied and it gurgled with delight when I relaxed.

During my third year in law school I moved into a furnished apartment. It had a four-poster bed, not with a canopy, but with four posts sticking up in the air. It was perfect. I tied a sheet to those four posts and turned the gust of the fan into it. The effect was like being on the ocean in the middle of a gale. I thought it was ingenious, others thought I was deranged.

On through life I sailed but eventually discovered I had to have more than just the companionship of a fan. I needed a partner for my life. I needed to be married. That's when the conflict began. Fans and family do not necessarily mix.

It never entered my mind I would have to give up my trusty fan when I got married. True my wife and I had not discussed my fixation with a fan, but I just didn't see how anyone could object to a practice that brought me so much pleasure and peace. I soon learned someone could and did.

I must have had some kind of premonition that the fan would not be accepted with open arms by my bride,

for although I had the fan in the trunk of our car when we went on our honeymoon, I left it there. It didn't appear in our lives until we had returned home and were setting up housekeeping in our apartment.

By this time, I had traded in my airplane engine for a smaller model. It was still an open air fan with a wire screen through which you could stick your fingers and crank it if the engine was slow in getting started. This openness proved to be disastrous.

The fan had been relegated to my side of the bed. It sat there day and night like a noble guard. It was fiercely loyal to me and didn't like anyone else. I repeat – anyone else. My poor wife would go around to that side of the bed when she was making it up. Many times I would have left the fan running and it would literally charge her and chew at her nightgown.

One time I remember well. I had left for work but had to come back to the apartment to get something I had left. As I came in the door I heard all kinds of screaming and angry shouts. I stood in the door of our bedroom and observed a tug of war going on between my wife and the fan. The battle ended in a draw as the fan had to turn loose but it took some of the nightgown with it.

Saint that my wife is, she still allowed the fan to run at my side until one fateful night. I used to sleep with one foot out from under the covers so that I could feel the air currents stirred up by the fan. That night in my sleep I swung my foot around for some reason and it went into the back of the fan.

Now a fan's blades are set so you can not be injured if you strike them face on. You will only glance off them. But if you enter from behind they can cut and decapitate a finger or toe. My big toe went in from the back. It was a horrible awareness and jolt to my foot. My wife was immediately awake and questioning what had happened.

I tried to stay calm and tell her nothing had happened but I was also desperately feeling to see if my big toe was

still attached. It was still there but it had been wounded. The telltale blood was on the wall. My fan had become public enemy number one and was banished from our room forever.

Later we moved into our home and got ceiling fans in just about every room. One we missed was the guest bedroom, which eventually became my youngest son Sean's room. To compensate for the lack of a ceiling fan I gave him a big box fan. He loves it. I do too.

Some nights when the insomnia gets too much for me I sneak into his room and curl up with my blanket in front of the fan. The air billows around me and the soft roar drowns out my cares. It works every time. I am asleep instantly and the sleep I get is fan-tastic.

Dad's Goodness Came Naturally From Every Bone In His Body

“Father’s Day” has come and gone and my gift has been sent to my father in South Carolina. This year he got a picture of me and my two sons. I thought that was kind of appropriate for “Father’s Day.” My wife Terry sent her father a picture of her with the two boys.

My father lives in Clinton, SC, and that is a small town. I imagine when people come to the house and see the gift they will naturally assume my wife and I are getting a divorce. Why else would she not be in the picture! I just hope my father doesn’t have to spend hours explaining and declaring we are still together. They have already heard there is one divorce in the family (my brother’s) and I know they are just waiting for the news about me.

Anyway “Father’s Day” causes reflections back on my personal life with father. And in dwelling on those thoughts I bring up memories of a man who worked, and worked, and worked. He got up early in the morning and he worked until late at night.

The first job I remember him having was as a Pepsi-Cola salesman. It was great because I was a Pepsi drinker at that time. We were a family fiercely loyal to my father’s products and to this day I feel a small pang of guilt when I reach for my Diet Coke.

At the time my father was working for Pepsi I thought he must be the strongest man in the world because he

could swing those cases of Pepsi off the truck with ease. Maybe he was the strongest man in the world.

My father had been an athlete in high school. He played baseball, football and ran track. Poor man, neither of his sons inherited his athletic prowess. My father was such a good athlete that he was offered a scholarship to college. All he had to pay was \$100, but his family did not have that hundred and my father went to work instead.

After Pepsi my father went to work as a bread salesman. He sold Merita bread. That bread sponsored "The Lone Ranger" radio and TV shows so I grew up with a sense of personal identification with that masked man. I was a member of the "Lone Ranger Fan Club" and I had a mask and silver bullet. Plus I never ate a sandwich which was not Merita bread through and through. People, I thought were our friends, used to try to sneak and buy another brand in the grocery store without us seeing them. But I saw, and I made mental notes as to their loyalty.

Being a bread salesman, my father went to all the stores in town, and naturally everyone in town knew him. And they all liked him. I mean they all, each and every one liked him. He was and is a man who inspires only kind thoughts in people.

At one time, I thought such goodness was only blandness but with maturity I have realized it for the excellent trait it is. It is hard to be nice and good without being a wimp and my father is no wimp. He is a gentleman, a gentle man.

I don't know how much my father and I are alike. Some people who know us both say there is a good bit of resemblance in looks and in traits. But I know I am not as good. I have to really work at being good. With my Daddy it comes naturally from the heart and from every bone in his body.

Surviving Labor And Delivery

When my oldest son turned 16 recently it was the cause of a great deal of reflection on my part. I found myself reliving the experiences surrounding his birth. Those were the days, 16 years that seem like 16 months or maybe even 16 weeks.

We were living in Rocky Mount, NC, during that time. I had just taken a job with Hardee's Food Systems as a real estate attorney. What that meant was I wrote contracts for the purchase of land on which to build Hardee's restaurants. It was a fairly good paying job and all the burgers I could eat. That was when my weight problems started.

We had only been in Rocky Mount a few months when we found out Terry was pregnant. I remember rushing into my boss's office and telling him I was going to have to have a raise. Poor man thought I had completely lost my mind – that is until I told him I was going to be a father. He immediately began to give me some father-to-be-advice, and he didn't give me a raise.

My father had told me that when the baby was born I was to call and tell him immediately. If for some reason he was not at home I was not to tell my stepmother. He wanted to be the first to know. Talk about putting you in a bind! My father was working then, he had not retired, so chances of him being at home when I called were pretty slim.

As it turned out the baby had to be induced. He was weeks overdue and all the walking around our apartment did nothing to encourage his birth. There had been some pains which I duly noted, but my notebook showed they were hours apart instead of minutes.

We were scheduled to go to the hospital on a Monday. I wheeled my wife in and they took her away. This was not one of those hospitals where the husband got to be in the delivery room. My space of operation was the waiting room. There I sat and smoked, and smoked, and smoked. I had given up cigarettes when we first found out we were going to have a baby, but now I started back with a vengeance.

Around noon, the janitor came into the waiting room. We started a conversation and he said I must be the man who had just had a son. Well I knew this wasn't true because I had just talked to a nurse and she said nothing had happened.

"You must have me confused with someone else," I said stiffly. "My wife has not had our baby yet."

"Oh yes she has, you have a little boy!" he demanded.

"No she hasn't!"

"Yes she has!"

And on and on it went until he said, "I am going back there and check."

I couldn't believe it but through those doors he went with his mops and bucket. I couldn't go through them but he could.

A few minutes later a nurse appeared with my son in her arms. She stuck his foot through a hole in a glass panel and I got to touch my son for the first time. It was the miracle to end all miracles.

While I stood there crying with joy the janitor pounded me on the back saying, "I told you that you had a son!" He had been the first to tell me and he had been right.

Within a few minutes I had placed a call to my home in Clinton, SC. My father answered the phone and I told him about his newest grandchild.

“Isn’t that just like that sweet Terry,” he said. “She had the baby on my lunch hour so I could hear about it first.”

Sure Dad, sure.

Modern Families Also Have Modern Problems To Face

The story you are about to read is basically true. I have changed the names and some of the circumstances to protect the innocent – and me. It sounds like something on a soap opera and if I had not heard of it first hand, I wouldn't have believed it.

The story came to me directly from my friend Trent. It was his monthly call to keep me informed on his family. Trent is one of those guys who has a modern family. There is he and his wife Dotty. Then there is his ex-wife Joan and her husband Charlie. Plus Trent and Joan's two kids live nearby. Daughter Katie is married and expecting Trent's first grandchild. Son, Scott, is involved in other adventures.

All of these people live in a radius of fifteen miles of each other, and they all communicate on a weekly, if not daily, basis. Joan's parents also live nearby. Her father is a Presbyterian minister and he tries to keep everything on a moral plane.

Trent is overjoyed about the approaching birth of his first grandchild. But he is not thrilled with Katie's behavior. She has fallen twice in the last week. Trent says it is sheer clumsiness. One time she was walking on the street after it rained and she slipped. Another time she was in the shower and slipped. Neither time was she or the baby hurt but Trent says one more slip up and he is taking the baby away from her. Obviously Katie doesn't know what valuable cargo she is carrying.

All of this was interesting, but I wanted to know the real purpose of his call. And that I found out was Scott. For some time now Scott has been seeing a young woman named Cindy. Cindy, according to Trent, is a good-time girl from the word go. Or to put it another way, Trent says she is a charter member of “Tramps-R-Us.”

Scott and Cindy have been “living in sin” for about a year now. Everyone has tried to ignore it hoping it would go away, but it hasn’t. They are still an item.

In June Scott graduated from college and asked his father for a trip to Hawaii for a graduation present. Trent balked at such an expenditure. But then ex-father-in-law, the minister, called him and said he would pay the \$800 fare for Cindy if Trent would spring for Scott.

“But you would be condoning an out-of-marriage relationship,” said Trent.

“Well, Scott just has his heart set on going to Hawaii and you know he wouldn’t go without Cindy,” said the grandparent side of the preacher.

“Why don’t we just pay Scott \$1600 to go alone and hope he meets somebody in Hawaii. There would be less chance of disease,” said Trent. His ex-father-in-law was not amused.

So plans were made for the Hawaii caper. They were proceeding nicely when out of the blue Cindy’s father called her. Now this man has not been heard from in years except for a child support check here and there. But suddenly he is the voice of sanity in an insane world.

He begged his daughter not to go to Hawaii unless she is married. She agreed if he would pay for the wedding. He agreed and suddenly Scott was engaged to the “Tramps-R-Us” queen.

Joan, Trent’s ex, said she would have the rehearsal dinner if Trent would pay half. Trent agreed that sounded fair and made plans to send a check. But then it dawned on him that when he and Joan were

married refreshments at a party they gave consisted of a can of Vienna sausages and some pop tarts.

I was very familiar with this brand of Joan's culinary talents because I was at that party and had eaten half the night's refreshments (five Vienna sausages) before I realized that one little plateful was all the food the party guests could expect. The other six people didn't get one sausage each.

This knowledge made Trent check with Joan to see what the menu would be. He found out her plans were for burgers in the backyard with butter beans and corn on the cob. That was quite a spread coming from Joan but Trent decided Scott deserved better.

Stepmother Dotty was even talked into planning the dinner and making reservations at a nice restaurant. Joan agreed it would be nice BUT Trent would have to pick up the entire bill. Trent agreed to feed the flock and still spring for half the honeymoon trip to Hawaii.

Plans were now going smoothly until it dawned on Dotty that something else was happening the night of the rehearsal dinner. It was scratching around the edge of her mind, but she couldn't quite put her finger on it. Then with a shriek her mind screamed, "Julio!" Yes folks, that Julio.

Julio Iglesias was going to be in their town on the night of the rehearsal dinner and Dotty had tickets for her and Trent. Nothing was going to mess up that night for her. She had been planning to see Julio live since she first heard him sing about "all the gerl he lubbed befur."

Now the battle lines were drawn. No Julio, no rehearsal dinner. How could it be resolved? Easily. Who says the rehearsal dinner has to precede the wedding on the immediate night. This wedding would have the rehearsal on Thursday, Julio on Friday, and wedding on Saturday. Solomon in his wisdom could not have solved it with more class.

The event will take place later this month. I think I will pass on taking it all in, and just let Trent fill me in later. He would prefer that I make the next one and let this one slide. He is sure there will be another wedding for Scott.

The reason I know is because of the last thing he said to me on the phone. It was “The sooner they get married, the sooner they can get divorced, and the sooner everyone can get on with their lives.”

I think he may be fooled. Scott knows the worst about Cindy and it hasn't made any difference. Now he wants to have the best life possible. I am pulling for them to make it. For as Julio sings – all the previous loves aren't important. Only the current one is.

Lightning Commands Respect

From earliest childhood I have had a healthy respect for the power of lightning. To be honest I have had a total fear of it. When the storm clouds come and the lightning begins to boom you won't find me out and about. I seek the solace of home and protection of solid walls.

I really don't know why I have this fear. I know my mother also had it so maybe she passed in on to me. Her fear came because of a close call she had as a child. Even though I feared lightning I used to love to hear her tell about her brush with death by means of a "lightning ball."

In the house where she was reared there was a huge upstairs. It had to be since there were eight bedrooms and two baths up there. There were eight children in the family and four shared a bath. The rooms were arranged along a stretched out hall that ran from one end of the house to the other. The staircases went up and down to and from the second story at right angles so you had to turn off the hallway to get to or from the stairs.

Ventilation was aided by having a window at each end of the hallway. This kept a breeze moving constantly during the spring and summer. On the day of the "lightning ball" both windows were open.

Mother was up in her room and was unaware a storm had come up. The first awareness she had was when a loud clap of thunder sounded and shook the house. She

wandered out into the hallway to see if anyone else was disturbed by the storm. No one was there.

She started down the hall when a burst of lightning came about and hit the power lines outside the window. A “huge” fireball ran down the line, and came straight in through the window. It was headed straight for mother, but her older sister Velma was also coming out of her room and pulled mother back into it with her and saved her life.

The fireball went straight down the hall and out of the window at the other end. Where it went then nobody knows. But mother and Aunt Velma always swore this was absolutely what happened.

Like I said this was one of my favorite stories my mother would tell. And she would always end it by saying that if Aunt Velma hadn’t pulled her out of the way of that fireball she would have been “fried alive!”

Never wanting to be “fried alive,” I made sure that when a storm came up I was always home and safe. If I couldn’t be at home I was always told a car was the safest place to be. Those four rubber tires would protect you from harm.

On August 10, 1988, I found out how close one can come to being “fried alive,” and also that a car is not man’s best friend in a thunderstorm.

That night I had gone to Atlanta on business. I was headed home around 8 p.m. and decided to go by Conyers. I write for the newspaper there and wanted a copy for my files.

Conyers is a very nice place to visit but it is also the worst place for storms in Georgia that I know. The worst rainstorm I was ever in was in Conyers. The worst hailstorm I was ever in was in Conyers. Now I was heading there and little did I know but the worst lightning storm I would ever be involved with was taking place there.

When I got to Conyers that night the lightning was flashing all around me. But I kept saying to myself that

I was fine as long as I was in a car. I was protected. I was safe. Over and over I repeated this to myself as I drove to the front of the shopping center where there was a newsstand with a Conyers paper in it. It was right there in front of me, not ten feet from my car.

The storm seemed to subside, and for some reason I decided to rush and get my paper. I left the car running and the door open. I made it to the newspaper rack. I inserted my quarter. I got my paper. I turned around to head back to my car and – lightning struck my car!

It was a blinding flash, a sharp crack of thunder, and a knowing that it had happened. But it was all over in a second. I had missed being “fried alive” by being out of the car. For some reason I had been spared and I said a quick prayer of thanksgiving as I crawled back into my vehicle.

The car was still running, nothing smelled of being burned, everything apparently still worked, but I knew it had been hit. Still all I was concerned with was getting home. I wasn’t going to sit there and examine the car detail by detail.

When I started out my mind was telling me something was wrong and then it dawned on me. I had no lights. That was what the lightning had struck. It had knocked my lights out.

Conyers is sixty or seventy miles from my home in Perry, and I had no lights. I also am no mechanic. My mind does not analyze what is wrong with a car and tell me how to fix it. It just doesn’t work that way. So I tried the Jackie Cooper method of repair – I flipped the blink switch on and off hoping it would jiggle the light back on.

That did tell me something. I may not have had dim lights but I did have bright lights. So off I went to Perry with my lights set on bright and people cowering from the glare. I decided it would be best to take the back roads as I wouldn’t meet too many people and permanently blind them.

Just as I reached the outskirts of Conyers the sky opened up. The rain began to come in sheets. I could hardly see the road. But if I thought I had trouble I knew the people meeting me head on were in worse shape. They had to contend with the blinding rain AND my bright lights.

I would see them coming down the road toward me and they would begin to wobble in the road. As they got beside me they would roll down their windows and yell obscenities in my ear. Or they would make their feelings known with gestures using their fingers or fists. It was not a pretty sight.

Finally the rain stopped as I reached McDonough. At this point I decided to move to the interstate for the rest of my journey home. I might still be blinding people by my brights but I would know the road better. It had to be a better journey from that point on. As I found out I was wrong again.

When I reached the interstate outside of McDonough, I found it to be pretty empty of cars. I eased onto the road and then it came alive. Cars and trucks came from everywhere. And there I was in the middle, bright lights illuminating the night.

That was bad enough but then the sky opened up again. The rain came down in torrents and the heat from the road surface created a steaming effect. When my bright lights hit it I felt like I was driving through cotton. It was a surreal experience and one I do not want to ever repeat.

The shower was a brief one and soon my only problem was the force of my lights in the rear view mirrors of my fellow drivers. At least I thought that was my only problem but drivers on the other side of the interstate were blinking their lights to tell me to cut mine back to dim.

I got behind one truck and couldn't pass him as there were cars on either side of me, going my same speed. I knew he didn't like the brights in his rear view mirror by

the way he stuck his hand out the window. I decided he must have been a meat cutter by profession and had lost four of his five fingers in an accident as only one was visible.

Seeing that his wave to me was not getting the desired results he next proceeded to turn on a spotlight he had affixed to his cab. The spotlight was turned about until he found the perfect angle for shining it in my face. Now we were both blinded, he by my brights and me by his spotlight.

I managed to find a way clear to pass him and sped down the road to get away from that light. Once I finally got in front of him he turned on his brights and gave me a dose of what I had given him. Oh well, turn about is fair play I guess.

Eventually I made it home to Perry. It had taken three hours for what is usually a two-hour drive. I told my wife and children what had happened but I could see on their faces they didn't really believe me. Lightning strike the car? Ha!

The next day my wife took the car to our friendly auto repair shop. The globes on the lights had to be replaced. The mechanic said it looked like they had been struck by lightning. God had sent me corroboration.

So the next time you are driving down a road and see some poor fool coming towards you with his lights on bright, don't blind him with yours. Show some patience. He might have just had his car struck by lightning. You never know.

And the next time you hear Vicki Lawrence singing about "The night the lights went out in Georgia," listen a little more carefully. You might hear me singing these new lyrics, "That was the night my lights went out in Conyers. That was the night they cursed an innocent man!"