

## Hibiscus:

There's a hibiscus in flower just off the front porch with its blooms of rain forest dimensions and a color that makes ordinary pink green with envy. It was startling to walk out the door this morning and see this marvel poking through the porch rail staring up like a puppy at us. All mornings should start this way. Greeting by hibiscus should be mandatory. There would be more laughter, fewer frowns and almost no crime.

The flower has even more meaning for me at this particular time because its onrush to glory, it was barely budding ten days ago, was fostered by one of the worst weather weeks I can remember. Nothing will ever top that week in the summer of 2007 when the world almost washed away but last week came close. On our side of The River the heat and humidity increased every day from Monday on, ratcheting up its intensity until, by week's end, the air was soup, the flora had flopped and Shiloh, the world's best dog, was nothing but a dank doormat. It was the kind of week that mold lives for. In Moldtown living rooms there are framed needlepoints that read "90-90" referring to their favorite temperature and humidity. By Friday we and our houseguests (we are masters of timing) were looking at each other the way long term cellmates do.

So what did Friday give us? Four inches of rain. Four more inches to go with the umpteen inches we have received since June 1<sup>st</sup>. Starting early in the morning and continuing until noon Veronica and I were in the basement manning two shop-vacs, running two utility pumps, dehum and fans. I don't mean to frighten you but the picture is important. Here we are, two sixty-somethings, in our skivvies and boots, performing a synchronized vacuuming routine from one corner of the cellar to the other. If Balanchine were alive he would choreograph it. If Tchaikovsky were here he would immortalize it in a ballet. The sweat is pouring from us and we are looking at each other with that look that says, "Hun, I think the water is going to win this time."

It was close, folks, real close. The water found new cracks to come in, new routes to follow and new places to puddle. There was literally no spare time between emptying the shop-vacs and returning to task. It's a good thing we're still in love. Four and a half hours of non stop dancing the basement two-step. We did spins, we did cross-steps we did dips (I hit my head twice on the stairs so I learned to dip), we did "how-de-do's" as we passed each other. We even eked out a smile every so often, each of us to tell the other, "It'll be OK."

Around about ten o'clock or so I turned off my machine to tell my partner in sumping, "I think it's slowing down." at which point the thunder boomed, lightning flashed and the rain really came down. I know she wanted to say something about the uncanny wrongness of my observation but she didn't. Great teammates are like that. It's OK to ride the other players most of the time but when the chips are down and the game is on the line you just don't do it. You keep your head up, you do what you know you can do and you win the game. That's one of the reasons I love her, a better teammate you could not find.

After all of this, after we struggled to keep the house from becoming an aquarium, after we bid farewell to our guests still in good cheer, after we got the harvest in for Market, after the Market Morning is locked in fog that grew into a steam bath of a day, Sunday dawns bright and dry and cool and peaceful. It was like when Dorothy and her friends come out of the meadow and beheld OZ for the first time. We went from Bogey and Kate in the African Queen, bogged down, mosquito bitten and beat, to Rocky at the top of the steps, alive again and "Feelin' Strong Now."

And then that flower happened. It was sometime this afternoon that I realized what all the pain of last week was for, what the rain and the heat had led to. We were in the tropics for a week, tropics at the latitude of N 43.90.854! It was a week climatologically suited to the Amazon... and so was Monday's bloom. Sometimes things work out for the best. That week, that infernal week, gave us this astounding hibiscus, and while I wouldn't want to do it every week I can say that this one was worth it.