

**Christmas on Route 301
- Special Short Story -**

Well boys and girls, the story is about to begin. Check this page daily to keep informed.

Your comments are always welcome.

Write to: sowohmanyfeathers@nc.rr.com . . .

Look for Christmas on Route 301

Happy New Year

Christmas on Route 301

The Blizzard

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Lola at the Hampton Inn

Home At Last

Christmas on Route 301

Written by: Mary Ann Urda

It wasn't like Sam and I didn't know there was a snowstorm brewing before we left Connecticut for our home in North Carolina. Somewhere in the back of my mind was the thought of being "Home for Christmas". Well, we had always been home for that holiday..... We woke up early, 3:00 AM ,, packed the car with Christmas presents, some miscellaneous stuff.....

golf clubs, extra cat food, extra cat litter, extra blankets, sandwiches, water, hats and gloves, thermos of hot coffee

mixed with cocoa..... I put Lola, our cat, in her carrying case (she's a trooper willing to go anywhere at any time). Little did she know what was in store for us. Lola is a long haired fluffy cat, 4 years old. I adopted her a year ago from the Moore County Animal Shelter in Carthage, North Carolina. She comes and goes with us and is a wonderful travel companion.

.....she's the cat with traveling paws.

Not much to see at 3:30 AM.....we pulled out of the driveway heading for the Merritt Parkway. We took a sigh of relief.....no snow as yet. There was little or no traffic on the parkway, the sky was still dark but clear. Sam always takes the first shift of driving until we hit Route 301, heading South.....then I take over for 3 or 4 hours while he takes a nap. I had called friends in Pinehurst, NC the night before checking on weather in that area. All was clear.....they would call if the conditions changed. It was Dec. 19th. There wasn't very much time left for us to get the house ready for Christmas, but we could put it all together when we got home.....baking Christmas cookies would have to wait. I didn't want to think about that now. We decided not to stop for coffee, but to drink the coffee we had in the thermos. We would make stops only for gas and restroom. We knew we

were heading right into snow, but had no idea of the severity of the storm. Traffic was still light, the sky at 6:00 AM was a cold steel gray.....still the weather was on our side.

Lola had on her red velvet bow with bells. She sat in my lap purring away. Ah, to be a fluffy warm innocent cat.



Lola, Queen of the Traveling Paws

We were on the Jersey Turnpike when very small flakes of snow started to cascade down upon us. The kind of flakes that you just know “this is going to be some snowstorm”. These snowflakes are called Hexagonal Plates. They were coming down fast, wind blowing them in all directions. Still not too bad

driving. Our small Saturn was doing very well indeed.

I did a few karaoke PowerPoints as we drove along. The information was not too good. We might have made a carbon based error.....still, it wasn't all that bad..... should we go forward, find a hotel, turn back. well, turning back was never an option. It's the same old "DIYD or DIYD"

So we continued on, kicking it free style. Sam started singing Jingle Bells, Hark the Harold Angles Sing, Rudolph the Red Nose Reindeer, etc. The road was still clear, snow increasing the further south we went, but still not a problem. Travel on the parkway had picked up, the wind whirling about, knocking snow from the trees giving the appearance of driving through fast moving clouds. Traffic had slowed down, everyone trying to avoid an accident.always a more than reasonable distance between cars. Sam didn't want to stop until we got to the Chesapeake Bay Bridge. That would be the critical point.....stop, find a motel or keep going. The sky was bleak, snow coming down fast and furious. The conditions were getting worse by the minute. We still had plenty of gas in the tank, but Sam felt it would be wise to cap the tank off. That was a VERY smart decision. We still had in mind to make the

Chesapeake Bay Bridge.



The Blizzard

A blizzard is a severe snowstorm with strong winds and poor visibility. Well, we sure had that..... and more. We had headed straight into it. After filling the car up with gas we stopped at McDonald's right across the highway from the Hampton Inn which is in Middletown, DE on Route 301. We should have pulled over to the Hampton, but you know how it goes maybe we could still make it closer to the bridge. Another carbon based error. From here on in it was one calamity after another. We almost made it out of McDonald's parking lot. There is a very odd off exit area here, especially when you have to deal with deep snow. Don't forget, we were driving a small Saturn, (Sam was still driving, my turn might never come) we would have been fine if we didn't have to stop at the stop sign.

Number 1 The stop area has a slight uphill grade..... the snow at this point was already 2 feet deep. We still had

plenty of light..... the snow had let up a bit.....the car swerved to the right into a snow bank. Sam tried to back up.....no good,..... move forward, no way. We got out (lucky we remembered to wear our boots) and thought about calling a tow truck. The nearest place to call would be at McDonald's. It probably would have taken 1/2 hr. of walking through the snow to get there and would we ever get back.? What would we do with Lola? Traffic was stalled behind us, some cars went around us, but one pickup stopped, the driver got out and offered to help. He, his wife and Sam pushed and rocked the car to no avail. They worked for about 1/2 hr. until another pickup saw our distress and offered to pull us out with his tow, which he did. This guy, the other guy and his wife were happy with just a "Thank You". But if you think we will ever forget them you are wrong. These were good people..... and many more along the way.....always.

On our way again. Within a matter of minutes the snow and road became more demanding. We must have gone 3 miles on a beautiful stretch of road that passed farm land. Looking out the window I suddenly became dizzy. Sam asked me to watch ahead and to guide him on the road. I realized we were in what is called a "whiteout" also known as "flat light". This had

happened to me once before while skiing. Whiteout or flat light is a weather condition in which visibility and contrast are severely reduced by snow. Very dangerous. I told Sam he had better pull over because I wasn't feeling all that good. Fortunately we were the only foolish people driving south and for that matter nobody was headed north either. We were the only people out here. Oh, my goodness!

The smart people were back at the Hampton or home in front of a pleasant fireplaces snacking on feathery, buttery popcorn. With Sam's guide now spinning around, getting sick to her stomach, he swerved to the left as I shrieked STOP! This probably saved us from doing down a fairly deep gully. As we sat in the car we figured we had already spent 11 hrs. traveling..... and less than 475 miles to go.....we should have been home by now.

Number 2 Sam ate a sandwich, drank some coffee (you know what I was doing) and chatted about how smart we were to fill the gas tank, wear our snow shoes, and have our hats, gloves.....but no shovel. We hoped we would be rescued before too long. Lola was asleep in her case.....what did she know? Lucky cat! Sam turned to the left, looking out his window

to the opposite side of the highway. He saw a police officer, his car and a van that had run off the road into a very deep gully.

Sam told me to stay in the car as he was going to cross the gully where we were stuck to see if he could help the officer and the other stranded driver. He just about opened our car door when the officer shouted for him to stay where he was. Do not get out of the car. The officer said he had called a tow truck to get that stranded van out and he would send the truck over when the van was pulled out. He said he would drive around to come to our aid. So we sat in our car, waving to the people in the stranded van, waiting our turn. There are no short cut offs or turn arounds at this point of the highway. It took the officer some time to get to our side.....the roads were getting slicker by the minute, which didn't help. In the meantime, the tow truck came and was working to get the van out of the gully.



That was some job.

They were buried nose up into deep, soft snow. Finally the officer reached us. He asked if we had plenty of gas, could we keep warm, did we have water and blankets. Yes to all the above. Thank goodness! He told us the tow truck would come

over to our side after he got the van out. He would cruise the road to see if anyone else needed assistance. He would be back in 1 hr. or so. We were to stay in the car. Well, where else could we go? We knew we were in trouble. We were “grounded”, if you know what I mean.

Sam kept saying “this is a nightmare”.....I didn’t want him to get any more depressed than he was.....so I said, “no, this is an adventure”.....that didn’t go over too big. The van heading north was pulled out. We sat and waited our turn.

The snow was so white and clean. The trees, wind blown, as snow waft across the highway forming small drifts the length of the road. If we weren’t where we were, stuck in a cold car, wipers frozen, dizzy and cold it would make a beautiful monochromic picture. It sounds pretty, but we had no idea if anyone would be coming.....soon I hoped.



Flashing yellow lights appeared as we looked out the rear window. We saw a faint shadow of the tow truck as it inched it’s way towards us.

It finally pulled in front of our car..... Carpenter’s Towing..... the sweetest truck in the world.

Merry Christmas

The driver was our Santa. The tow truck was rather large. We were situated kinda sideways not offering Mr. Claus a good advantage to hook us up to his tow. I didn't image the angle that we were in was that difficult, but we were snagged. We were told to stay in the car while he worked. And he did work.....it took longer for him to pull us out than it did the van across the highway. As I said before, traffic was light, well, you should never speak too soon. Out of nowhere large trailer truck began to pass on our side. Why now? Where were they hours ago? I could've used a nasty word , but I didn't. Mr. Claus (I think he really was Mr. Carpenter) fished us out only to have the tow truck slip into the gully, worse than we were. We were out.....he was in trouble. Sam got out to see if he could help and to pay Mr. Carpenter. Mr. Carpenter would not accept anything.no money or our help. Yes, there is a Santa. He said he had phoned for another tow to get him out. He told us to turn around, (drive back about 3 miles) and head back to the Hampton Inn. There was to be no other way for us at this point. We had to turn around and drive miles back to the Hampton. That 3 miles will add up to Number 3, 4, and 5. A Nightmare or Adventure?



The trucks that passed us had left tracks in the slush making it easier for Sam to follow. We must have traveled 2 miles south before we came to a turn off heading north. On this side we were once again in flat light, not good. There had been no traffic on this side.....no tracks to follow, no signs of any living thing.

We traveled about 500 feet before we again skidded into a snow bank on the left. We sat and waited and waited and waited. I finally had the bright idea to take the cat litter and spread it under the rear wheel.....good idea. Sam geared up, pulled on his ski cap and gloves pushed open the door stepping into deep snow. I got out on my side, covering Lola with one of the extra blankets as I grabbed her litter, (it was clean). Next trick was to use one of the extra blankets we had and place that under the rear wheel if you thought the cat litter or blanket was magic, they weren't.....it didn't work. So back in the car we went to wait it out.

A car finally passed coming to stop ahead of us. Two guys got

out.....
my thought.....a perfect murder scene...freezing cold, no
traffic, no living
person around, just us and them.

They were BIG GUYS!
As they approached I cracked my window open....they asked if
they could help.

Sam geared up again getting out to see if the three of them
could push, rock,
roll, shove, to get us out. Alas, it didn't work. They said they
were sorry they
couldn't help. Just a lesson that we all know.....

Never Judge a Book by its Cover

And there we were again.....stuck

Number 3 And what to my wondering eyes should appear, but a
wonderful tow truck full of towing gear. Mr. Claus made his
appearance once again. He towed us out, not wanting any
compensation but a thank you. He told us to follow him down
the road until he made his turn-off toward his home. He would

stop again if we needed him.

Number 4 As we drove on we saw halos of street lights along the side of the road, but had no idea where we were. We kinda thought we were close to the Hampton, but once again skidded.....this time to the right, my side for a change. Sam got out, came back in, just about ready to give up when, again a pickup truck appeared with maybe 3 or 4 guys inside. One guy got out of the truck and headed for our little Saturn. What an Adventure! People are like that....willing to help. If you don't get out, (I mean to meet people) they would never find you. We met some very nice people. Warms the heart! If we didn't make it home for Christmas the people we met made our Christmas. I cracked open my window as the guy approached. He asked us where we were going. Sam told him we were headed for The Hampton. Oh, the guy said, its right across the highway, you want a tow out?

Well hello, do we want a tow out? We couldn't even make out the image of the hotel from where we were. Another guy got out of the truck and hooked us up, pulled us out and said to follow them to the hotel. Sounded good to us.

They left us at the front door, wished us luck as we again slipped into an area that had not been plowed yet. There were other cars stuck in the driveway, but were able to move out. I left Sam in the car as I got out to check if there were any rooms available at the hotel. Bonnie, at the front desk said they were booked solid. Back out I went to tell Sam the bad news. The snow plows were trying to clear the area so the cars had spaces to park. It looked like a circus out there. Cars trying to get out of the way, trying to find spaces to park, etc. And there sat the Saturn right in the middle. Sam was tired, when I told him there were no rooms available. He said we would have to sit in the lobby, we just couldn't go on.

Number 5 Out came Meaghann and her crew. There must have been 5 guys plus her who were going to push the car out of the way. They had to let the plows through. Before we got too far from the front door I asked her if I could get out. I grabbed Lola, covering her carrying case with a blanket. I started to walk towards the entrance when Lola started to meow, really really loud. Meaghann heard her and said, oh, my gosh, there must be a cat out here somewhere. It will never survive. I told her it was Lola and she was OK, just wanted to get inside, maybe get some cat food that I had put in my purse. Meaghann was

relieved to hear it was not a stray cat caught in this storm. I left Lola in her case, settling her in a secluded corner and went back outside to help Sam unload one piece of baggage we would need. The rest of the stuff could stay in the car. By the time he parked the car Meaghann was back inside working away at the computer. She told us to sit tight; we were next on the list for a vacancy. She was going to check to see if anyone had decided to cancel their stay. We hoped..... Meaghann had put us in a room off the lobby because people were coming in with dogs. Big dogs. My kitty won't stand a chance, and who needed that problem when we were in the middle of a blizzard! We didn't know how long we would have to wait for a room, but at least we were inside, warm and had fresh coffee, other travelersstranded just like us.



It's Almost Over



The American Way

Meaghann checked on us every once in awhile to let us know if rooms had come available. She said she was now working on asking if the overnight employees were willing to share rooms.....which they were



I left Sam and Lola alone in the room while I went out to the lobby to get some hot cocoa. When I got back he was asleep with his hand resting on Lola's head. I think they had the worst of the deal. I got Lola's bowl out, poured some kibble into it and got her some fresh water. Bonnie had given me old newspapers

to shred for her litter box..... we used the other litter for traction for the rear wheel of the car. I let them sleep while I went back to the lobby. The lobby was busy. I went over and poured myself hot cocoa, sat down and watched. I am a watcher. There were people putting bought frozen food into the microwave, sharing with others. There were children sitting with parents, eating what they had brought. There were people watching TV. The Eagle's Game was the big thing. People had been on their way to Pennsylvania to see the game but got waylaid by the blizzard. I met grandparents from Charlotte, NC taking twin 16 year granddaughters to Rockefeller Center so they could ice skate. I met a family from Ocean City, Maryland with 3 young children who had never seen snow before. They couldn't wait to get outside the next day to play in it. I met a woman traveling alone from Georgia on her way to spend Christmas with her daughter in Connecticut. It was amazing to see. Everyone, it appeared had accepted the situation and were willing to share, help each other and all seemed happy. Happy might not be the correct word, maybe accepting the situation. What else could you do? You couldn't change what was happening. It made my heart light when I saw and spoke to these people. Maybe that's why I call this chapter "The

American Way.” That’s the way we are.
Meaghann found us a room and guess what

.....we all slept!



We were grateful to the employees that gave up their rooms. I would think, not only for us but for other travelers as well. The plowing continued throughout the night.....always plowing and reploting.

The next morning the breakfast room was full. There was enough food for everyone. Even though the roads still looked bleak, people had already left. Sam thought we should wait until maybe 11:00AM before we made a decision. Ah, but by 10:00 AM the sun shone and we were on our way.

Home At Last!

below are pictures taken from our window

Thanks, Meaghann for all your work. I hope you all had a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.....Stay warm.....Mary Ann



It was fun reading the comments. Lots of people said it was a nightmare, others, like me, said it was an adventure. And you can see I only put the adventure people in the reviews.



Merry Christmas from Lola

