

IN PRAISE OF THE
PEOPLE OF OCRACOE ISLAND
BY THE ONES THEY CARED FOR
AFTER THE BONNER BRIDGE INCIDENT
Oct. 26, 1990



Herbert C. Bonner Bridge - Fri., Oct. 26, 1990

On October 26, 1930 a dredge was driven by a terrific rain and wind storm into the Herbert Bonner Bridge across Oregon Inlet. It knocked out 370' of bridge and cut off Hatteras Island from the northern beaches and the mainland. The island was left without power and telephones.

A panic ensued with thousands of people heading, in their vehicles, for their only exit Ocracoke Island.

The results were amazing in the number of vehicles and passengers handled by the Ferry Division of the Dept of Transportation, Park Rangers, local and State Police, Coast Guard, Marine Corps, National Guard, Salvation Army and the people of Ocracoke who emptied their hearts, pocketbooks and pantries to care for and feed more than 5,000 people. The restaurants, stores and individuals did themselves proud with no thought of compensation.

These letters were their reward!



In the early morning hours of October 26, 1990, the Outer Banks of North Carolina was weathering the force of a storm producing gale force winds with gusts as high as 90 miles per hour.

Officials received word at 1:05 a.m. that as a result of this storm, the dredge NORTHERLY ISLE had broken free of its anchor and was moving toward the HERBERT C. BONNER BRIDGE. Spanning Oregon Inlet, this is the only bridge link to Hatteras Island. The bridge, after this report, was closed to traffic.

At 1:28 a.m. the NORTHERLY ISLE struck the BONNER BRIDGE, dislodging a 369 foot section. Approximately 53 minutes later, this section of the bridge, being unable to withstand any more stress, collapsed and fell into the churning waters of Oregon Inlet, severing power cables in the process. The NORTHERLY ISLE was now wedged between the severed sections of the BONNER BRIDGE. Thousands of residents and tourist, many temporarily without electrical power were stranded on Hatteras Island until weather conditions would permit ferries to operate.

For the next three and one-half months the only way for motorists to travel to Hatteras Island and the southern Outer Banks of North Carolina was by ferry service.

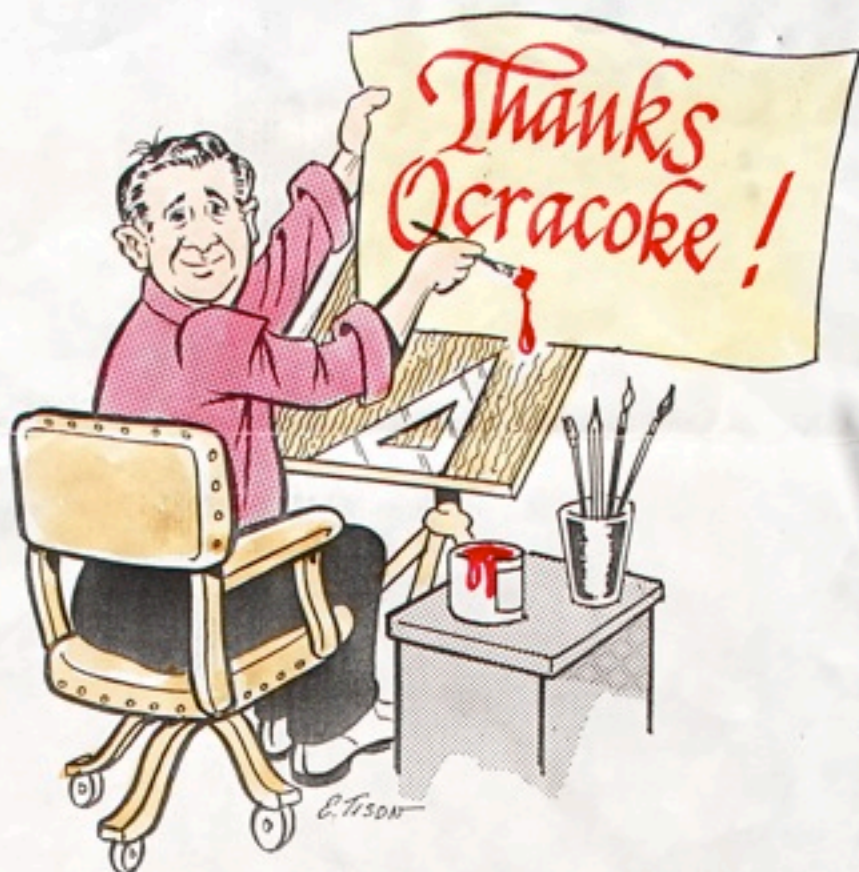
On February 12, 1991, with repairs complete, Hatteras Island's road link to the rest of the world was re-established when the HERBERT C. BONNER BRIDGE was re-opened for travel.

Dredge Collides With Bonner Bridge



FACING A STIFF gale-force wind, three county officials carefully make their way to the spot where the dredge Northerly Isle crashed into the Herbert C. Bonner Bridge, spanning Oregon Inlet at about

1:30 a.m. Friday. The collision knocked approximately a 300 ft. section from the north end of the bridge, closing the structure to all traffic for an undetermined length of time. (J. Wooten photo)



Ed Tison * 445 Summer Dr.
NEWPORT NEWS, VA. 23606

To The People of Ocracoke,

October 31, 1990

As one of the people stranded on the Outer Banks Islands this past week, I would like to express my thanks to the good people of Ocracoke who really "went the extra mile" in looking after the needs of the many travelers in the long, long lines. Thanks again.

Ed Tison

October 30, 1990

Ocracoke Volunteer Fire Department
Ocracoke
North Carolina 27960

Dear Sirs and Madams:

I have been to Hatteras Island and to Ocracoke Island several times in the past and have enjoyed my stay every time. Unfortunately, this last time was quite a bit different. My friends and I were stranded due to the bridge being knocked out.

Sometimes words are not adequate to tell people how much they are appreciated but please know how grateful and appreciative I was for all the kindness you showed us while we were in those lines awaiting the ferry. It truly impressed me as to how all of you and your families came out to make sure everyone was well taken care of and that we had enough to make us as comfortable as possible, considering the situation.

I spoke with several of the volunteers as they came by, but I'm sorry to say that I do not remember their names. I offered to pay for the food and beverages but was informed that they could not take my money but, if I wanted to make a donation to the Ocracoke Volunteer Fire Department to help purchase a new truck, I could do so.

Though the enclosed check may not be much, please accept it as part of my appreciation for all that you did to help make the situation a lot easier to cope with.

Thank you again.

Sincerely,

Thomas J. Andrews

*5855 - Swepsonville - Saxapahaw Rd.
Graham, N.C. 27253*

Enclosure

STANLEY M. FARRIOR, D.D.S.
308 SOUTH BENNETT STREET
BURGAW, NORTH CAROLINA 28425
TELEPHONE 259-6554

November 5, 1990

To The People of Ocracoke:

I was one of many who spent the night on the road outside of your village on the night of Sunday October 28, 1990. This plight for many people was made necessary of course due to the early Friday morning accident when a dredge rammed the Bonner bridge over Oregon Inlet disconnecting Hatteras Island from the rest of the world.

I was especially pleased and grateful for the way the people of Ocracoke came out and brought coffee, soup, cookies and all sorts of things to eat. We were offered rides into town to purchase needed items and at night blankets and sleeping bags were brought out for anyone needing them. You people of Ocracoke did yourselves proud and those of us stranded on the road last week outside of your town will always have a special feeling for the people of Ocracoke.

Thank you very much,



Stanley M. Farrior, D. D. S.

P.S. Please find enclosed check to the Ocracoke Fire Department as a token of my appreciation.

Dear friends,

A little over a week ago, when the bridge went out - I guess I can say that and you know which one I'm talking about - I came to your island to catch the ferry back to the mainland, along with many other folks (God...how many of us were there?). Anyway, I just wanted to thank a few people:

The Park Ranger (or whoever he was) that was there in the road waiting for us just outside of town, the people coming over from Hatteras, so he could give them some good news and some bad news. Some good news was that the ferrys that would eventually take us to the mainland, were operating, and on an emergency schedule. The bad news was that they were operating from the far end of town, and the far end of town was five miles from where we were and the only way to get there was by getting in line - behind that car right there, just in front of you - and staying there no matter what.

No matter what.

No matter if the line that you were now a very small part of , only moved less than every five hours, not even if it only moved 2.5 tenths of a mile at a time. At least it was moving, and so you knew that every five hours , another unit of cars - 2.5 tenths of a mile of cars - bumper to bumper, was loaded up at the far end of town and headed out. No matter what.

Let's see...2.5 tenths of a mile...five miles...it was maddening to ponder on these things. So I didn't.

I 'd like to thank that kindly island woman with the blond hair, and her friends, who rode by the Stranded Band in their pick-up truck, and asked if we'd like a sandwich, or a coke. The meat was bologna, the bread, it was white; I like mine with mayo , but hey...its alright. Beggars can't be choosers, besides, if you had seen me wolf it down, you'd a thought it was a chunk of sirloin.

I'd like to thank all those self-proclaimed fishermen who walked up and down the line telling lies. Thanks to them I was able to assemble a doosey of my own before I got home.

I'd like to thank that guy at the (Trade Winds?) , who sold me a pound of bait, a bag of ice, and a sixpack on my credit card. Also, the fish that I did catch, just for being there, and making me feel like my patience had been rewarded (I cuaght all of these on Okracoke Island after, I thought, I'd done all my fishing back at Hatteras). And a special thanks to those three young tween-age girls who were behind us in line, who I think had never before seen such creatures as bluefish or flounder from the sea, and made me very proud for the chance to introduce them.

Most of all, I'd like to thank Okracoke Island itself, for being the kind of place that you don't feel so bad about being stranded in - or on, I should say. A place where warm, generous, and caring people have come to live (all 600 and...something...of you), who don't mind too much - or let on anyway, if they do - that a half a thousand strangers or so, have dropped in for the weekend. You were very nice.

Last, but not least, I'd like to thank all my fellow members of what I call the Stranded Band. You made the best of an unusual - and for many - a difficult situation. You helped each other remember that a friend is someone one can find anywhere, and that people can be trusted no matter what you might hear otherwise.

No matter what.

On the drive back, once I was safely off the ferry and on my way back home, I got behind a couple of slow cars. It was an ideal place to pass slow traffic, marsh land a lot like the island where we had just come from... where the water is so close to the road on both sides and the road goes on straight into forever...so that when you cross a little bridge (Try Yard Creek, perhaps) you have the illusion of driving over a piece of the sky...but I didn't pass those cars. I just happen to recognize them and, well you know, we never broke our place in line.

Thanks again,

Joan Williams

Dean Williams
175 Heritage Lane
Salisbury, N.C.
28144

If inadvertently I have overlooked anyone, it is only my fault and would come one there extend my apology for the oversight.

All through the event, I tried to offer payment or a contribution to help with the expenses but to no avail. I was always told that the person was just glad to help. I realize and appreciate this very much. Now its my turn. Please find a check enclosed made payable to the Ocracoke Vol. Fire Dept. which I hope will be put to good use in the future. Also enclosed is a check to the Ocracoke School. The children who were serving soup and coffee to us proved the future of our country is and will be in capable and caring hands, now and in the future.

I hope my small contribution will be just one of many you & we folks deserve.

With fond remembrances of a
truly unique weekend,
Sincerely

Charles C. Schoenmaker

Suicide Note

Please put my
Body at the head
of this line. Is
that good
enough excuse
?

Note handed to Commissioner Alton Ballance as he toured the line of vehicles.

Oct 27th Day #2 Line up of first of more than
3000 vehicles on lot behind ferry office



William A. Lampley, M.D.
P.O. Box 1763
Hendersonville, N.C. 28793-1763

November 1, 1990

Mavis Sears, Editor
P.O. Box 312
Ocracoke, North Carolina 27960

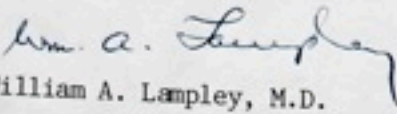
Dear Ms. Mavis:

As one of the many who were stranded by the recent collapse of the bridge at Oregon Inlet during the storm of Thursday night, October 25, I would like to express the thanks of all of us for the many acts of kindness and consideration extended by the residents of Ocracoke.

A serious burden was placed upon you folks by the lack of contingency planning by other authorities when this unfortunate accident occurred. Without warning hundreds of cars with thousands of men, women and children were shifted onto your island without any way to evacuate them. Your people responded nobly and made a bad situation bearable. From the young man who picked me up late Saturday night and gave me a lift to a telephone, waiting and then taking me back to my car: To the many residents who cruised the waiting line offering food and hot beverages: To the kind lady who spent the day bringing food then the evening chauffeuring people about: To the many who offered their time and labors to set up shelters Sunday when the responsible government agencies failed to do so: To the wonderful women who were serving hot drinks and sandwiches at the ferry ramp and to the many more behind the scenes who worked and prepared the food, coffee, clam chowder (real Ocracoke chowder) and performed other unseen chores.

To all of these people I want to say a most grateful thank you. You were the real heroes. We won't forget.

Sincerely,


William A. Lampley, M.D.

108 Ripley Rd.
Williamsburg, Va. 23185

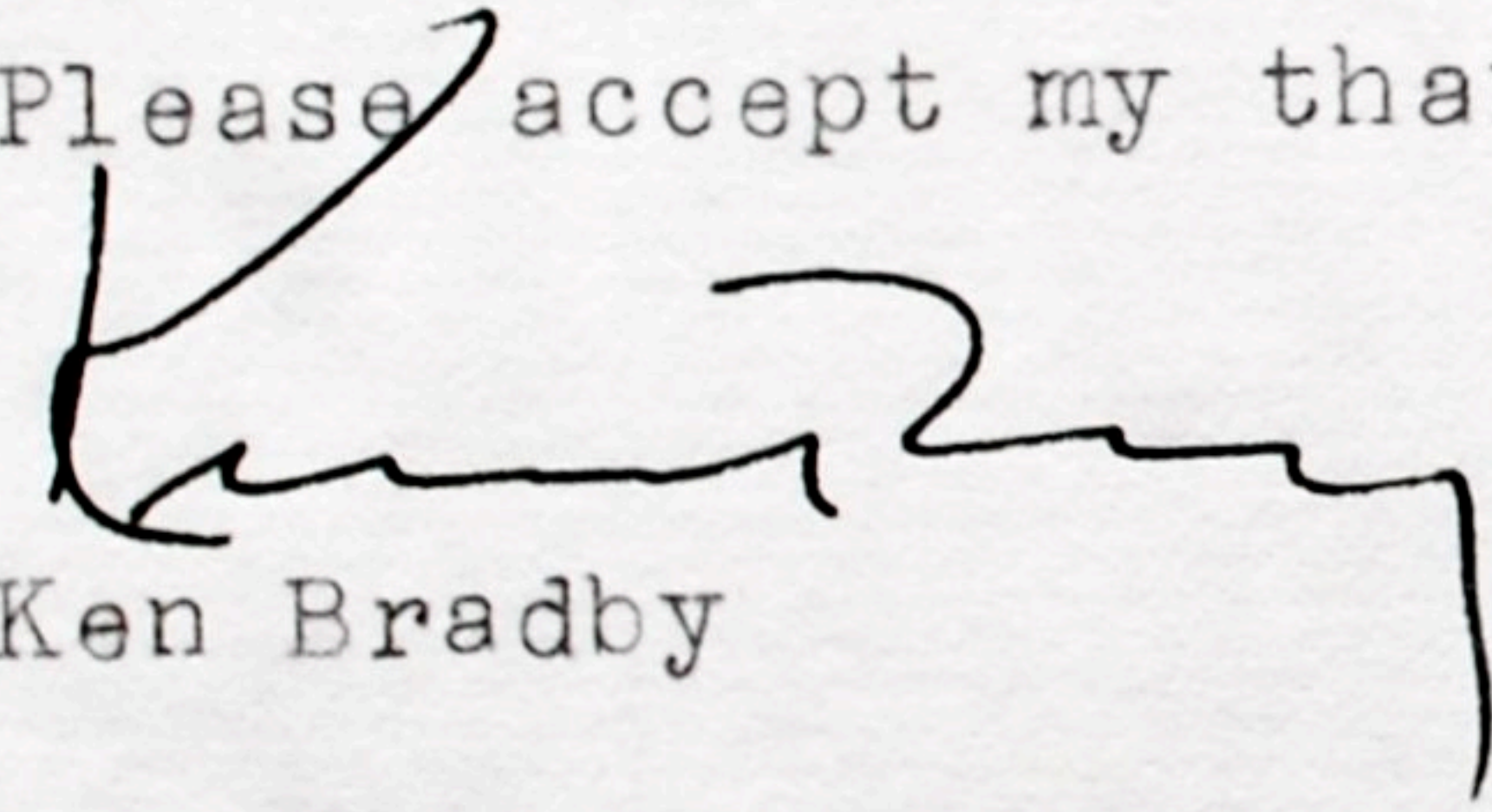
TO THE MEN AND WOMEN OF OKRACOCK ISLAND:

I was one of those 5,000 or so Outer Banks visitors who found themselves stranded in your neighborhood last Sunday. I was the one in the blue Toyota.

It is very difficult to put into mere words the gratitude, and perhaps more than that, the realization that there are every day human beings who, when sensing a need, immediately spring into action with aid and comfort to a group of complete strangers.

At noon last Sunday, I had not eaten for 26 hours when the first of your Angels of Mercy appeared in a pickup on Route 12 with sandwiches & Cokes. They were followed, throughout the day with more sandwiches, coffee; then, as the sun began to sink about 5:30, and we began to realize that we were in for a cold night in our cars, other people in other trucks began dispersing home-made Okracoke Clam Chowder! Absolutely delicious. The very welcome blankets and sleeping bags closed out a day of unselfishness and cheerful altruism, the likes of which I have never seen.

Please accept my thanks and admiration.


Ken Bradby



R. Brandt Deal
Winston-Salem, NC

November 1, 1990

Mrs. Anita Fletcher
Ocracoke Post Office
Ocracoke, NC 27960

Dear Mrs. Fletcher:

I wanted to take this opportunity to thank you and the Ocracoke Islanders for the fine hospitality and out pouring of food and assistance these past few days.

In a time when no State or Federal officials seem to know what to do or how to do it, the citizens of the island took it upon themselves to provide food, coffee, bedding, transportation and medical assistance to those in need.

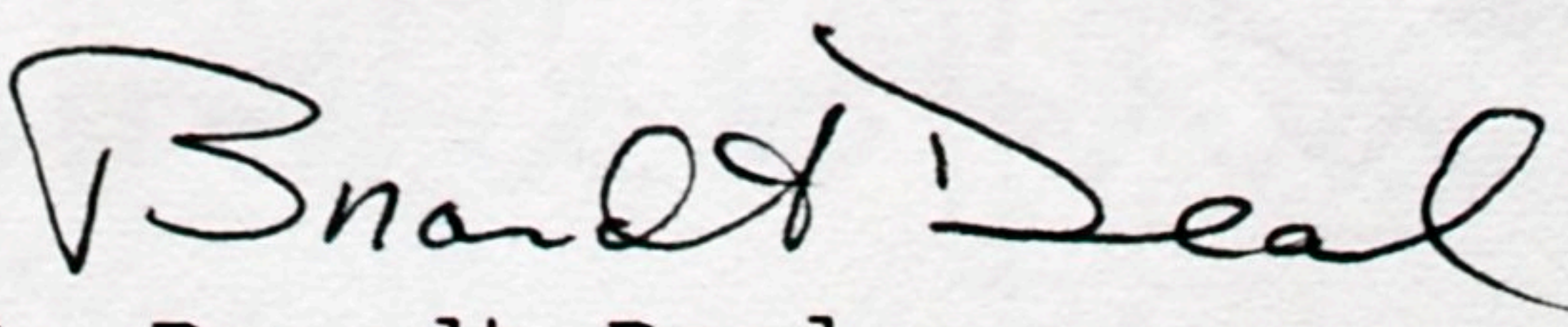
Sharon and Norman Miller were kind enough to let us stay in one of their cottages and refused to accept payment for the night we stayed there. This was typical of the attitude and friendliness that everyone experienced during our unexpected stay on Ocracoke. Though some people were most distressed in having to unavoidably spend time on the island, my daughter and I were most pleased to be able to spend another day in paradise.

Enclosed is a small check with the payee's name left blank. I hope that you will direct it to the proper people to help defray some of the costs of your relief effort.

This trip to the Outerbanks was my thirteen year old daughter's first encounter with your part of the world and she thoroughly fell in love with the area and the people.

Please thank all of those who helped with the effort and let them know that their kindness and compassion will not be soon forgotten.

Thanks Again.


R. Brandt Deal

RBD/ab
Enclosure



STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
RALEIGH 27603-8001

JAMES G. MARTIN
GOVERNOR

November 9, 1990

The Honorable Alton Ballance
Hyde County Commissioner
Post Office Box 510
Ocracoke, North Carolina 27960

Dear Mr. Ballance:

I have recently learned of your generosity and helpfulness during the days following the collapse of the Bonner Bridge.

Your kindness extended to those visiting the Outer Banks area will long be remembered. It is during times such as this that North Carolinians notoriously band together in support and concern for one another. You have indeed shown us that this tradition lives on.

Thank you for your help in this time of special need.

With warmest personal regards.

Sincerely,


James G. Martin

JGM:hce

cc: Mr. and Mrs. Gary Moore

Another Expression From Inconvenienced Travelers

To the editor:

On Thursday evening, October 25, a friend and I and our two teenage kids arrived on Hatteras Island, about three hours before the Oregon Inlet was rendered impassable.

We woke Friday morning to 35-65 mph winds, no electricity, and 2-3 feet of water over parts of the island. After dealing with the most immediate necessities (gasoline and food from one of the few stores with generator power), we learned quickly that our biggest problem for the next couple of days would be the lack of reliable information. Due to news helicopters, the "outside world" had a better idea of what was going on than we did.

People began ferrying to Ocracoke Island early Friday night and by Saturday the line of vehicles on Ocracoke reached six miles. I am told that the wait in line to leave Ocracoke via ferry to the mainland at one point reached 30-40 hours.

We went over Sunday morning. For the 30 hours we were on Ocracoke Island we met hundreds of people from as far as Canada, Florida and the Midwest. We met sport fishermen, windsurfers, tourists, "hippies," car-

penters, doctors, attorneys, six-month old babies...We met people in recreational vehicles equipped to have hot meals and a warm bed and families in sedans that were totally unprepared.

Not once did we encounter a bad attitude, or even anything more than good-natured grumbling. In retrospect, I attribute the good nature of the crowd to several things: The weather, although cold at night, was very pleasant Saturday through Monday. The people from the ferry service, National Park Service, NC Highway Patrol, and American Red Cross were patient, cordial and helpful. Most people that travel to the Outer Banks this time of year have an appreciation of the outdoors and perhaps a more "laid back" attitude about life in general, or they would be vacationing in more exotic places.

But by far the biggest factor was the outpouring of generosity and hospitality from the townspeople of Ocracoke. Day and night the locals provided sandwiches, hot soup, coffee, drinks, fruit, transportation, free lodging, and any and all assistance, requested or not. I am told that many businesses and individuals on Ocracoke contributed to the effort to make their uninvited guests comfortable. I'm sure that this was at considerable expense.

What strikes me is that this generosity was from people whose lives will be the most adversely affected (at least in the near future) by the loss of the tourist dollars that collapsed with the bridge. It also impressed me that the local stores did not "take advantage of the situation" by raising gasoline and food prices.

We don't often have the opportunity to personally witness total selflessness in others. It was a good reminder for all of us, particularly our teenagers, of what's really important, people helping people.

We consider ourselves fortunate indeed to have been there when the bridge went down.

WYN GODWIN

High Point
November 12