

a SOUTHERN Yankee

By Lori Lamore

I was certain as butter and biscuits that I knew all I needed to know about the Golden Isles when I moved here. After all, my Southern roots run deep and wide in Georgia, like Kudzu along the roadside — only in a good way.

Well, as that once famous TV Southerner Gomer Pyle used to say, for those old enough to remember or who watch TV Land, “Surprise, Surprise, Surprise!” The good news is that most of my surprises have been delightful. For example, the people of the Golden Isles exceed the highest standard for Southern charm and hospitality. On the not-quite-so-bright-side, I have been slightly overwhelmed by the reptilian population and the dangers thereof that they present to life and limb.

Another thing that has caught me off guard has been local phrases that I had never before heard. Take for example the phrase, “Where do you stay?” In the North, staying implies temporary lodgings. So when people around here asked me this question, I would reply, “I’m not staying anywhere. I live here.” I got some odd looks from my answer until I figured out the intended meaning of that question.

Now, as for my Mama, who moved to the Golden Isles with me and my young’uns, she took to her new town like duck in a lake during a rainstorm. And why wouldn’t she? After all she was born and reared in Telfair County. Like my Mama always says, “You can take the girl out of Georgia, but you can’t take Georgia out of the girl.”

My adjustment, and that of my children, was a tad bit slower than my Mama’s. But once I got past all the surprises, we’ve grown accustomed to this place and are as happy as gnats under floods lights to call the Golden Isles our hometown.

Here are a few of the surprises that took my family and me a little getting used to as we adapted to Coastal Georgia, slow talkin’ and plenty of hospitality.

1. Hospitality. As my family and I drove through neighborhoods in search of a home, absolute strangers greeted us with waves and smiles. My kids kept asking, “Who’s that? Where do you know him/her from?” They were dismayed that I didn’t know these folks. But soon my children were waving and smile back.

“Gee, Mom, people really are friendly here.”

2. Acknowledge the elephant in the waiting line. Around here, people actually acknowledge each other’s existence in public and may even make small talk. Yankees pretend that there is no one else in a line and, most importantly, they avoid eye contact. In their mind, anyone who has the audacity to speak to them must either be a newly released mental patient or a criminal on the lam. In the Golden Isles, this Yankee odd behavior is seen as highly suspect.

3. Sand Gnats: The Invisible Enemy. We were prepared for the rodent-sized palmetto bug and have an arsenal of weapons to lure them to their doom. But how do you fight an enemy you can’t see? They appear from nowhere by the thousands to attack eyes, ears, nose, throat, all manner of skin right to the hair follicle on top of your head. Nothing will stop them. If the U.S. government could harness this insect’s tenacity and cloaking abilities, we would have the most brilliant weapon since the stealth bomber.

4. Alligator Neighbors. When I bought my home, there was no disclosure that alligators occasionally take up residence in the lake behind my house. Most recently a very hungry 13-foot gator spent a couple weeks in my lake eating fish, turtles and eyeing my dogs, cats and children. I felt like Captain Hook. When the gator saw me, it swam up to the bank. The kids and I decided it was best to remain inside for the duration of its visit. If I had been from the South, I would have said dinner crawled up in the yard, but I can’t quite get there yet.

5. Speaking of Gators, how ‘bout them Dawgs? The week of the Georgia-Florida Game you’d best wear red and grab a pom-pom. The Golden Isles is one giant tailgate party from street to lawn chair to street. When asked about my UGA sentiments I just say, “I’ve been a UGA fan since my Mama first put me in black and red diapers.” That’s my story and I’m sticking to it.

6. Traffic. What traffic? Natives complain about the bad traffic. In truth, it can be a teensy bit congested on St. Simons Island. But darlin’, you ain’t seen nothin’ until you’re stuck on the Washington Beltway for three hours and you’re three miles from home and you hear everyone speed-dialing their Congressman