

Living in the dark: 13+ days without power in Western North Carolina after Hurricane Helene

BY SARA MURPHY
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Editor's note: After Sara filed this story but before it was published, her power came back on after being off for 13 days. The last section has been added to reflect that.

I've lived in Leicester, an unincorporated townships northwest of Asheville, with my elderly mother and stepfather since 2014. It's a lovely area with lovely people, and our mountain home has the most beautiful view I've ever seen.

Compared to most areas, Leicester made it through the storm pretty well. (In my first story for CharlotteFive, I reported on a local diner, the Salty Goat Grill, keeping folks fed since the storm hit.) Lots of downed trees, and some damage to roads. But as far as I know, we escaped the worst. We are truly lucky.

But we also have been without power, water and internet for 13 days in our neighborhood of about 15 homes, and managing everyday tasks with two elderly parents and two cats gets a bit harder each day.

AFTER HELENE: HAND WASHING AND TOILET FLUSHING WITH NO WATER

It's amazing how much longer it takes to accomplish the most basic of tasks. Each day, we drive five minutes down our winding mountain road to the creek to fill multiple laundry detergent bottles with water for hand washing and toilet flushing. Our semi-rural neighborhood did not experience any flooding, so while I wouldn't drink that water without boiling it, it works just fine for those other needs.

The flushing is particularly challenging if you're elderly and have less upper body strength. Whether you're pouring the water straight into the bowl to create a vacuum or pouring it into the tank so you can flush, it's impossible for my elderly mother. This has been a serious issue in senior living facilities around the region, as reported by volunteers of multiple "flush brigades."

COFFEE AND COOKING WITH NO WATER OR POWER

Even making coffee feels more complicated. Or perhaps it's just the realization that you're boiling water on the stove for a drab cup of instant rather than a cup of nicely percolated grounds that makes the task feel both more necessary and less fulfilling.

We're lucky to have a gas stove, but cooking has its limits when you know you don't have the ability to wash the dishes as well as you'd like. We're paper plating and plastic fork everything that we can, but hot meals require pots and pans, and the dirty ones are piling up.

Unlike many areas, we haven't had too much of a challenge getting food or — most importantly — drinking water. But the selection has narrowed significantly, given that our freezer is "powered" by four bags of steadily liquefying ice. (Ice has been in short supply at our local grocery store, even when rationed to two bags per family.)

The freezer mostly holds frozen butter and some egg whites now, while we have a smaller styrofoam cooler to hold



At the creek near our home, we would fill a 5-gallon bucket and then pour the water into the detergent bottles with a funnel.

more quasi-perishable items like smoked salmon, long defrosted peas, and some feta and provolone.

Bread with peanut butter features heavily on the menu, though tonight we're having some broccoli and carrots steamed on the stove to go along with potatoes baked on the grill.

HOW TO WORK IN THE DARK

One benefit is that I worked more efficiently this fortnight. Whether conducting interviews or writing articles, I don't get distracted going down internet rabbit holes or get precious over each word.

That said, however, when I interviewed two men in Morganton about their volunteer efforts, those conversations stretched for a long time. I could tell they needed to share, and I could think of no better use of my phone battery than to listen.

We each of us have a book's worth of tales to tell about surviving this experience, whether we barely lost power or had our homes washed away.

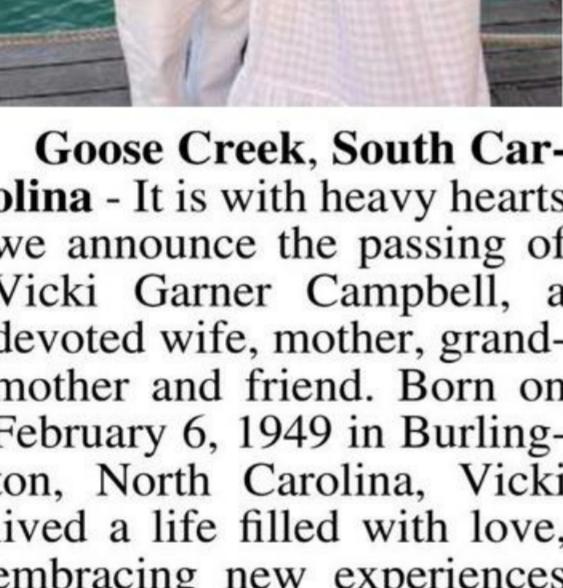
NEIGHBORS HELPING NEIGHBORS IN HELENE'S WAKE

Without our neighbors and their generators, we'd be up the creek. We've charged devices daily, used their Starlink satellite on that first weekend when cell service failed

It's completely dark by around 8 p.m. most nights, and our camping lantern, small flashlights and candles don't provide enough light to do even the lightest of chores or indulge in some bedtime reading. And, of course, even with cell service, we can't waste batteries on our devices.

Obituaries

Vicki Garner Campbell February 6, 1949 - October 14, 2024



Goose Creek, South Carolina - It is with heavy hearts we announce the passing of Vicki Garner Campbell, a devoted wife, mother, grandmother and friend. Born on February 6, 1949 in Burlington, North Carolina, Vicki lived a life filled with love, embracing new experiences and cheering for all things Clemson University.

Vicki graduated from Rock Hill High School in 1967. On June 29, 1967 Vicki married Senator Paul Campbell, beginning a wonderful journey that led to three children, the late Christie Parks, formerly of Summerville, South Carolina, Jeremy (Shireen) Campbell, of Davidson, North Carolina, and Caroline Campbell Burgreen (Alan), of Daniel Island, South Carolina. While caring for two toddlers, Vicki earned an Associate Arts Degree from Northeast Alabama Community College in Rainbow, Alabama. Vicki adored her four grandchildren, Caitlyn (Charlie) Carson (Greenville, South Carolina), Lindsay (Matthew) Wilson (Inman, South Carolina), Jonathan Campbell (Mooreville, North Carolina), and Alistair Campbell (Davidson, North Carolina); and her great-granddaughter,

In addition to her husband, children and grandchildren, Vicki is survived by her brother, Karl Raymond Garner (Mindy), of Summerville and Patricia Garner Bennett, of Summerville, who will carry her memory in their hearts. Vicki was preceded in death by her parents, William (Bill) Thomas Garner and Dora Greeson Garner; and by her brother, Wayne Thomas Garner.

A Celebration of Life will be held on Friday, October 18, 2024, at 12 p.m., at Vicki and Senator Campbell's home church of Dorchester Presbyterian, 10290 Dorchester Rd., Summerville, SC 29458. The family

will receive friends an hour before for a visitation. In lieu of flowers, memorials can be made in honor of Vicki to any organization or charity of your choice.

Rest in peace, dear Vicki. Your legacy of love and zest for life will live on in all who are blessed to know you.

Arrangements by PARKS FUNERAL HOME, 130 W. 1st North Street, Summerville, SC 29483. www.parks-funeralhome.com.

Obituaries

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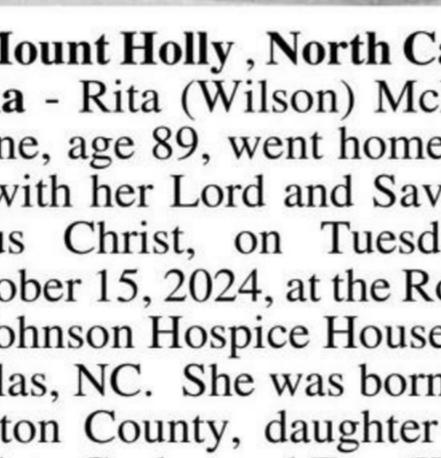
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NAME, AGE	CITY	DEATH	ARRANGEMENTS
Aycock, Helen (De), 95	Chapel Hill	Oct 04	Cremation Society of The Carolinas - Raleigh
Campbell, Vicki Garner, 75	Goose Creek	Oct 14	Parks Funeral Home
Isenhour, Dorothy Wojtowicz, 90	Denver	Oct 12	James Funeral Home
McElwaine, Rita, 89	Mount Holly	Oct 15	Woodlawn Funeral Home
Talley Jr., James Maynard, 87	Charlotte	Oct 16	Kenneth Poe Services

Bold listings indicate expanded obituaries

Rita McElwaine October 15, 2024



Mount Holly, North Carolina - Rita (Wilson) McElwaine, age 89, went home to be with her Lord and Savior Jesus Christ on Tuesday, October 15, 2024, at the Robins Johnson Hospice House in Dallas, NC. She was born in Gaston County, daughter of the late Gurley and Eva (Watters) Wilson. In addition to her parents, she is preceded in death by her husband of 34 years, Dan McElwaine; her children, Danny and Michael McElwaine; her grandson, Daniel McElwaine; and her daughter-in-law, Donna McElwaine; her second husband, Vance Cheek; as well as her siblings, Bill, Betty, Jerry, Joe, Libby, and Tony.

Rita spent her life as an entrepreneur and operated several successful businesses, including Tiny Tot Nursery School, Shack Shop, All Occasion Flowers, and C & M Realty, all in Mount Holly.

Faith was an important part of her life and she served the Lord in many different ways. She was a former active member of Second Baptist Church in Mount Holly, where she sang in the Choir and taught Sunday school for many years, and was also an

active member at First Methodist Church in Mount Holly.

Rita was a member of the Order of the Eastern Star and also served as the head of the Democratic Women of Gaston County.

Those left to cherish her memory include her daughter, Sonja Johnson (Mitch); her grandchildren, Michael

McElwaine Jr. (LeighAndrea), Casey McElwaine (Brittanie), Stevi Wike (Justin Verwey), Tyler McElwaine (April), Drew Johnson (Tonya), and Chad Johnson (Taylor); her great-grandchildren, Bennett, Sawyer, Currie, Roman, Bradley, Ruby, and Witten; as well as her special friend, Jerry Gordon.

A memorial service to cel-

lbrate her life will be held at

2 p.m., on Saturday, Octo-

ber 19, 2024, at First United

Methodist Church in Stanley,

with Pastor Brian Elwell of

ficiating. The family will

receive friends from 1 to 2

p.m., on Saturday, also at the

Church.

In lieu of flowers, the fam-

ily asks that you perform an

act of kindness for someone

in Rita's honor. Woodlawn

Funeral Home of Mount Holly

is serving the family.

ning of Oct. 9, it did so not with a bang but with gentle hums and beeps. For the first 10 minutes or so, I wandered the house, not quite trusting in our good fortune.

It took my stepfather turning on the taps and flushing the toilets to drive home just what it meant. "Is anyone else in a bit of disbelief, almost like a caged animal set free and too afraid to trust the grass?" I wrote in our neighborhood group chat.

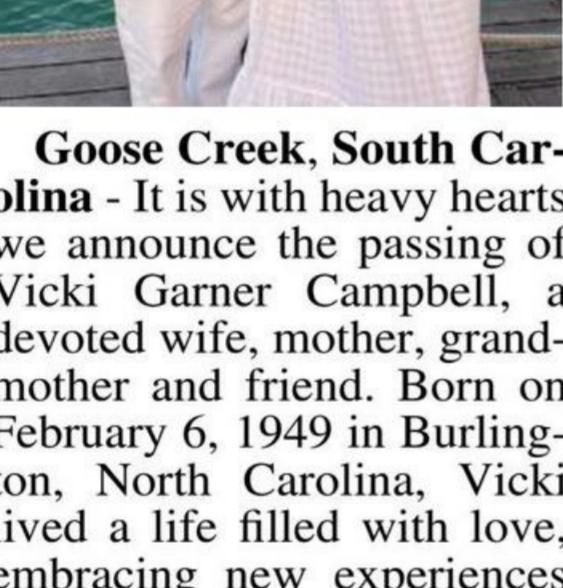
About half an hour later, though, we began to roar back to life ourselves. I turned on our Wi-Fi router and got a signal. In our excitement to clean dishes, we forgot to switch on the right valve and had a water supply error message.

In the two days following, we've done about 10 loads of laundry, five dishwasher cycles and cleaned every shelf in the fridge, which currently has a skeleton crew of food: a giant vat of vegetable soup, butter and condiments, a bit of cheese and about a case of bottled water. Having not just power but clean, reliable well water is a true gift; most municipal water systems in the region will be under boil advisories for a while. The irony that it was an overabundance of water that has deprived us of this most precious resource has not escaped me.

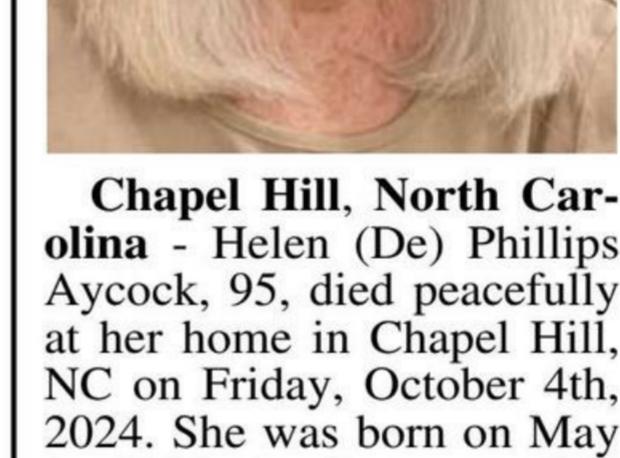
Now that we're not in rapid response mode, the exhaustion has hit; I've taken more naps in the past two days than I did in the 13 before them. It will take a while for a normal routine to return, even in our relatively unscathed household.

But once I recharge my batteries (and buy a major battery pack that can charge multiple devices for days at a time), I'll be ready to help recover and rebuild.

Sara Murphy:
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Helen (De) Aycock May 1, 1929 - October 4, 2024



Chapel Hill, North Carolina - Helen (De) Phillips Aycock, 95, died peacefully at her home in Chapel Hill, NC on Friday, October 4th, 2024. She was born on May 1, 1929, in Royston, GA; daughter of Benjamin and Ossie Phillips. Soon after high school graduation, De moved to Charlotte NC, where she began her professional career and met the love of her life Frank B. Aycock III.

They were married on June 6, 1950 in Charleston SC. De loved interior design, gardening, road trips with her husband, visits to the beach, and spending time with family and friends.

She is preceded in death by her sisters, Mary, Janette, Betty Ann, Patsy and brothers Terrell and Billy. De is survived by her husband, nieces, nephews and friends.

A celebration of De's life will be held at a future date.

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