

A few years back, I was out walking with the dog when we ran into a friend of the family, also on a walk. We caught up for a few minutes, and as everyone else in town would do, she asked about my mother.



I told her mom was doing well, always busy, and always, you know, mom.

She laughed and said, “You know, your mom is probably the funniest white woman in America.”

Our friend is correct. Mom is about hilarious. In a family of tall tale spinners and professional wisenheimers, she stands head and shoulders above everyone.

I must admit, who in the world would manage to strike up a conversation with, and even make friends with, the voice of her car’s On Star navigational system.

It happened like this. As you may now, On Star is a service to which drivers can subscribe. The system will not only give directions to pretty much anywhere on the planet, it can also track your vehicle and even call 9-11 if it thinks you’ve had a wreck or your vehicle has been stolen. It’s pretty easy to use, you just punch a button in your car and it automatically dials the number, then someone asks you where you are and where you want to go, and programs in directions for you. From then on out, your car literally talks to you – “make the next left at Exit 98,” or some such. It’s really pretty cool.

I have Gamin, which is sort of the same thing only it’s portable. And for a while there, it only gave directions in Greek, but I digress.

Anyway, Mom got n her car not too long ago, and apparently when she went to turn on the windshield wipers, she accidentally hit the button to call On Star. Next thing she knew, this nice male voice was coming through her stereo speaker, “Hello, Mrs. Tatum, how are you today?” Startled, she said she realized what had happened and laughed, then apologized for the false call. The voiced then said, that’s okay, business was a little slow, and perchance was she the Mrs. Tatum that worked at such and such a place – she’s such a nice lady, etc. Next thing you know, they’re carrying on like they’ve known each other for years.

Only my mother could do this.

Of course, she’s not above the occasionally shock bomb statement when necessary. Once, a telemarketer called and asked for my father, who had been dead for several years. He was using the old, “I’m an old friend from way back” kind of voice, only he dreadfully mispronounced out last name.

Mom thought a minute, then said, “No he’s not here, and if you happen to see the sorry SOB anywhere, tell him I’m looking for him.” Then she hung up on him.

I, on the other hand, have had very different experiences with voices on the phone, most of them neutral, a few fairly bad, and one absolutely surreal. Basically the short story is, I actually had to talk a telephone survey taker down from suicide while I was sitting on the toilet violently sick to my stomach. Don’t ask me why I brought a telephone to the bathroom with me – probably had something to do with being on a permanent job hunt – but I learned two valuable lessons that day. One, never bring a cordless phone to the bathroom –there are some things that just have to wait – and two, never, ever, ever ask a querulous female voice on the telephone if she is okay.

I literally said, how are you today, and she burst into hysterical, wailing tears, shrieking that she hated her job and her boyfriend had kicked her out and she was two months pregnant and all manner of problems straight out of, say, “Days of our Lives.”

Somehow, between intense stomach cramps and rising nausea, I managed to convince her that things were going to be okay and God loved her.

I guess it wasn't a total waste of time. I got the gig – even made a couple hundred bucks. And I think she got her life back together, at least she hadn't offed herself when I asked about her at the office.

But I will never, ever, take the phone to the bathroom again.