

There were a few hundred of us in Port Royal on that Saturday afternoon, enjoying the “Soft Shell Crab” festival, the music, the artisans and painters and carvers and hawkers.



It was a microcosm of the absolute wonder of living in this amazing place. Old southern families whose names are on the Declaration of Independence mingling with Yankee retirees from new ‘old’ communities called “Plantations”; young military families, the moms and dads pushing baby carriages; or maybe just mom or just dad pushing because dad or mom is in Iraq or Afghanistan, doing the work most of us never have to do. We were all there that afternoon, enjoying perfect weather in a near perfect place.

Roars in the sky are old hat around here. You know, “The noise you hear is the sound of freedom” (one of the best ad slogans I’ve ever heard). So there was nothing untoward about the screams of F-18s; especially not on the day of the big Air Show at the Marine Corps Air Station.

But something caught our eye: Four of the six Blue Angels high in the sky almost over Port Royal sound and a fifth Angel flying back from the direction of the air station to rejoin them in formation. Where had he gone? Had he gone to look for number 6? That was not something anyone knew at that time.

And then, in the midst of the fun and food, cell phones started to ring and worried looks appeared on faces far too young to have to be worried and snippets of conversation floated through the air. “It’s OK, he bailed out”. “One of the Angels is down but he’s OK”. “There’s been a crash”. There was wishful thinking, hope against hope, silent and spoken prayers but little information. We learned the awful truth a little later and it was a sad way for Beaufort to get national coverage and fame.

Thinking about the loss of this precision pilot on that sunny Saturday added to our collective sadness; that sadness intensified by the outrage at Virginia Tech that took 32 innocent lives. It should remind us that, even in a country that does such a good job of living the real meaning of freedom and liberty, there are still terrible imperfections.

Perhaps it also teaches us a little about the value of “context”. These tragic events occur against the backdrop of the Imus, O’Donnell and Baldwin media circus. Enough comment’s been made about Imus and the Reverends Jackson and Sharpton to fill a library. In my view, Imus was fired by CBS because he should have been. The Reverends Jackson and Sharpton came off as almost ludicrous, given the way they have both offended others before. Talk about “casting the first stone”!

Happily, ABC is not renewing Rosie O’Donnell’s contract. So, we can chalk up a big victory for quiet over grating loudness and bombast. Now, Alec Baldwin has gone on “The View” with Rosie to apologize for treating his own daughter worse than dirt.

You and I don’t need his apology. His daughter does.

News dominated by loud, ill-tempered celebrities at the same time that we lose those students and professors from Virginia Tech and that young pilot of Blue Angel 6.

Just as light would be meaningless if not for darkness and good might be difficult to explain were it not for evil, maybe we have to have the context of loud, angry and bitter people to understand the value and achievements of the wonderful ones we lose too soon.