

"CHRONICLES OF KATRINA"

By Steve Craig

Note: 'Chronicles of Katrina' is split into two parts: the first deals with a series of e-mails that relays over a ten month period the status of recovery efforts for the area. The second part then presents steps the reader is encouraged to undertake to be prepared for the next disaster.

Part 1 (excerpts)

Introduction

Katrina. Not Hurricane Katrina. Not Tropical Storm Katrina. Not even Disaster Katrina. Just plain Katrina. The name itself invokes universal memories of a destructive storm, the most costly natural disaster this country has ever experienced. While previous hurricanes (such as Charles, Ivan or Andrew) created a vast amount of damage, none were of the extent or had the societal impact that Katrina inflicted. Under intense scrutiny, the much maligned Federal Emergency Management Agency was overhauled and reorganized with increased funding to better prepare for future emergencies. Natural disasters, once relegated to back-burner status with Congress, moved to the forefront, resulting in budgetary increases and more oversight. New Orleans, arguably the gem of the jazz music industry, suffered greatly with thousands of evacuees unable to come home. The hurricane even resulted in women changing their names, tired of the incessant remarks about the name "Katrina".

Most Americans have heard of the devastation to New Orleans , but the real damage was to the individual, the families, and the local communities. There are literally thousands of stories of despair, depression, hopelessness, bankruptcies, and destruction. While thousands of Gulf Coast residents have recovered, many have not. This book presents a few of their stories:

On August 27th, 2005, Dan and his wife were just starting to unpack their belongings having just moved to New Orleans. They were excited about moving to this new area of the country and the thought of a hurricane hadn't crossed their minds. Arriving just a week before the storm, they were evacuated along with their friends and neighbors to Alexandria , north of New Orleans. Dan's residence was located just

blocks from the 17th street canal, and when storm waters broke the levee, it put their residence under ten feet of water. Everything they owned was gone, most of which were still in packing boxes. Dan lamented, *"You don't know what it's like, having all your life long possessions destroyed"*.

A retired couple living in the Lakeview district of New Orleans evacuated to their friend's residence in Kentucky shortly before the storm struck. Like everyone else in the country, the family watched as the entire area flooded. It would be six months before they could return to their home. When it was possible to return, the wife refused to come back fearing she would not be able to handle any additional emotional distress. Months later when the husband was gutting the home with the help of Coast Guard volunteers, they all had a surreal experience. Two hours into the cleanup, tour buses started arriving on regular hourly visits, driving by, observing the work being completed as part of the new tour package for tourists.

Phil and Barbara Anderson moved to New Orleans as a result of her job transfer with a government agency. Realizing a life-long dream to reside on the coastal waters, the couple purchased a home on a canal just outside New Orleans. Sitting ten feet above sea level, they felt their home was safe. Unfortunately, Hurricane Katrina's storm flooded their home with over eight feet of water. The force of the surge nearly destroyed the house and was sufficient to lift the refrigerator off the kitchen floor, punching a hole in the ceiling. Such was the power of the water destroying thousands of homes along the Gulf Coast.

With parts of New Orleans city under twenty feet of water, and 80% of the city flooded, businesses suffered substantially. The world renowned Aquarium of the Americas, though spared from the flooding, suffered a generator failure after a few hours, killing most of their fish.

Businesses, desperate to reopen, offered bonuses to attract workers due to the shortage of employees. Many businesses forced out of the area due to the flood waters, either relocated to other parts of the country or went out of business. Baton Rouge, once a slumbering city of 200,000 residents north of New Orleans, became the largest city in Louisiana 48 hours after Katrina struck the Gulf coast, a distinction that still holds today despite the passing of two years after the storm.

Thousands of evacuees were sent to various parts of the United States, from Seattle to Atlanta. Many family members were separated while either evacuating or being rescued. The lack of family emergency

disaster planning resulted in delays of a month or longer before families could determine each others safety and whereabouts.

All of the above stories are just small examples of the consequences of not being prepared for an emergency. Disasters are non-discriminatory. They can strike on a massive scale, regardless of economic or cultural backgrounds. They strike those who are prepared, unprepared, and those who believe it 'won't happen to me'.

Preparation includes not only gathering supplies and equipment in advance, but practicing and reviewing emergency preparedness processes.

December 8, 2005 (excerpt)

As I was flying in last Sunday, you could look down and see thousands of blue roofs, the result of the installation of tarps to prevent rain damage.

Things are coming back, but slowly. There are still sections of town that don't have power and/or phone service. Tempers are flaring with some death threats, a couple of government agencies are telling their workers not to wear the respective government shirt or jacket.

Thousands of people are still without homes, with FEMA telling some that their hotel vouchers will be terminated within a month. Some of that is warranted, some folks are just milking the system.

Scams are common from what I hear and read; folks lose their small boats and make no attempt to locate. One 50' boat owner claimed he lost his boat while it is still moored in front of his house.

One RV dealer was found to have just been incorporated a couple of weeks after the storm. Local RV dealers understandably want to know why FEMA granted this company a contract for RVs while not giving them a shot.

March 26, 2006 (excerpt)

One report I read had stated a lot of the people they have recently found in other parts of the country simply didn't want to be found. Some of the women found looked at Katrina as a chance to get away from abusive relationships; some people looked at it as a way to

escape criminal backgrounds. One person found in New York City threatened a FEMA official with death if his name was made public.

I read a report this morning in the local newspaper that only 50% of the nursing homes have reopened. This was an area of the population that was hit extremely hard with a lack of preparedness.

One nursing home had an evacuation plan that had a contract with a local bus company to transport patients should a need arise. Unfortunately the contract required 50 hours advance notice, which the nursing home didn't have. When they did place the call, they were told the company would call them back. They didn't. The nursing home was then forced to evacuate patients on their own, only to have several residents die due to lack of medical attention and bus conditions.

Many billboards are still lying on the ground; the ones that survived are mostly advertising the upcoming local elections. The election should be interesting. A recent report states that most of the registered votes, both black and white, still reside in the city. This is surprising, given that everyone assumed that a lot of the voters were out of the area. I doubt that will be the final conclusion.

It has now been seven months since Katrina hit this area. It will be a decade for recovery.

Part 2 (excerpts)

Twelve Home Preparedness Steps to Take NOW!

Are you prepared? Imagine that you're sitting at home and you have zero notice of a disaster. It may be a tornado or it may be an earthquake. Your first notice might be the public radio announcement that a pandemic has struck and has arrived with a vengeance. You have no extra food, water, medicine, gasoline, or emergency supplies. It is in the dead of winter with freezing temperatures. If you are able, you attempt to purchase emergency food, water, and emergency supplies at your local store only to find the shelves are bare. All stores and restaurants are either closed due to lack of electricity, lack of food or merchandise (sold out), or lack of employees. Here are twelve steps which could save your life and the lives of your loved ones.

1. Prepare a 72 hour kit. Prepare a home preparedness kit to include food, water, medicine, waterproof matches, prescription or reading glasses, extra batteries, and flashlights. For those with infants, include formula, diapers, bottles, and pacifiers.

Tip: Include games in the kit to keep everyone busy to prevent boredom. If the disaster were to last longer than a few hours, you would be thankful you had these on hand, especially if you have children.

2. Keep a supply of food, water, and a first aid kit in your home. After a major disaster such as an earthquake or hurricane strikes, water will become contaminated within twelve hours. Water is the most precious commodity immediately following a disaster. Experts recommend five gallons of water for each person, each day. With a pandemic, medical experts recommend a 30 day supply of food and water. To ensure freshness, rotate the food and water on a regular basis.

Tip: Purchase a water cooler from one of your local hardware stores for a five-gallon water bottle. Keep 3 or 4 containers on hand and simply rotate out.

3. Ensure you have adequate gasoline on hand. One may utilize extra gas cans stored in a safe, secure location to ensure adequate supplies will be available. In a pinch, siphon gasoline from your car, if needed, for the gas-powered generator or chainsaws. If you have advance notice of an approaching disaster, ensure your cars are full of gasoline.