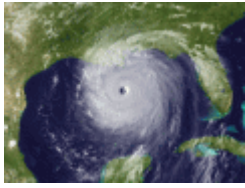


# Katrina – Ten Years After



NOAA Satellite Photo – Hurricane Katrina

Today, August 29, is the ten year anniversary of [Hurricane Katrina](#) making landfall on America soil. More specifically, the hurricane made landfall on Bay St. Louis, Mississippi, that day but the sheer size of the storm impacted the Gulf of Mexico coast for over 150 miles in both directions. Winnie and I were living on the Mississippi Gulf Coast then, and on storm day we were sheltering in a friend's house only 30 miles east of landfall. Katrina's landfall was a life-altering event.

The house we sheltered in took four feet of flooding and at the peak of the storm my wife, two other women in our group, and two little children were floating on a makeshift raft in the living room while another man and I swam outside to get his boat in preparation for evacuation. But the storm and floodwaters started to recede at that point and we all survived, albeit shell-shocked at the sheer magnitude of destruction. That evening we returned to our home to discover it had been flooded three feet and suffered extensive roof damage.

I wrote a number of posts about the storm during the year we spent rebuilding our home. All those posts can be found in my ["Katrina Diaries" category](#). I also wrote an extended story ["The Year of Hurricane Katrina"](#) around the one year anniversary that rolled a lot of those posts together and tried to make some sense of everything Winnie and I experienced. After ten years I'm in a better place to reflect.

As bad as the storm's impact was to us, Winnie and I were much better off than many other people along the Gulf Coast. Our house was still standing and mostly habitable even as we rebuilt. I kept my job and with the flood insurance that I had taken out after [Hurricane Georges](#) six years earlier we had all the money we needed to rebuild, and actually ended up in better financial condition. But the money wasn't enough. The biggest single impact of Katrina was that we ended up moving away from the community I loved. After ten years I still feel a sense of loss for leaving the Gulf Coast, even though Winnie and I have built a decent life here in Northern Virginia.

I continue to feel frustration that whenever anyone outside the Gulf Coast thinks about Hurricane Katrina they only think of New Orleans. Even now, all anyone is talking about for the ten year remembrance is New Orleans. What happened in New Orleans was horrendous, and the Government's failure to provide aid was unforgivable. But it was only a small piece of the entire Katrina story. The impact to the entire Gulf Coast was overwhelmingly more horrendous than New Orleans, and experienced the same shocking Government failure to provide aid on a much bigger scale. I believe that this narrow media focus on one small piece of the entire disaster is mostly deliberate, a diversion that allows people to deny the devastating reality of our changing climate and our future.

We've had a major hurricane disaster since then. In October 2012 [Hurricane Sandy](#), now colloquially referred to as a Super-Storm, wiped out Atlantic City, New Jersey, Staten Island, New York, and impacted a total of 24 states. Super-Storm Sandy also had an unexpected personal impact on me.

I had experienced symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome (PTSD) starting about seven months after Katrina and gradually got past it, or so I thought. In the aftermath of Super-Storm Sandy, seeing the images of destruction looked too much like what I had witnessed in Mississippi. Those images triggered flashbacks and serious emotional upheavals I wasn't

prepared to deal with. It was only then I realized the depth of my trauma from Katrina. I don't doubt that many people who suffered through Katrina and its aftermath are just as traumatized .

That trauma runs deep in the material world as well. There's a lot of news about New Orleans' Ninth Ward still not fully rebuilt. But there's no news I'm seeing about the number of homes along the Mississippi Gulf Coast that were never rebuilt either. Flood insurance was not mandatory for many people prior to Katrina, and many people who lost their homes didn't have the insurance money they needed to rebuild. Adding to the financial losses, post-Katrina flood insurance became mandatory for many more areas, and comprehensive hurricane insurance rates skyrocketed, making it financially nonviable for many people to rebuild. The last time I was on the Mississippi Gulf Coast (about November 2012) there were still large swaths of former residential neighborhoods turned into vacant land, with an occasional lonely foundation marking what was once a home.

My stories of Storm Day and our year-long recovery has received some publicity these past years. My story "The Year of Hurricane Katrina" was adapted into one chapter of the book "[Katrina: A Freight Train Screamin'](#)," by author Cary Black. He corresponded with me as he put together his book and comped me with signed copy of the first printing. It was flattering to be discovered and have my story appear in print. Cary's book tries to cover both Mississippi and New Orleans, and is probably the one book I've found with the best balance in coverage of the storm and aftermath.

More amusingly, I discovered my story of Storm Day appearing in a cheesy survival book.

I was shopping at my local Big Box Home Improvement Store one day and happened to spot a book titled "[The Ultimate Survival Manual: 333 Skills That Will Get You Out Alive](#) ," by author

Rich Johnson. As I idly thumbed the pages of heavily illustrated large-print narratives describing how to survive assorted natural and man-made disasters I spotted "Armand Charest," my father's name. Further reading revealed that my story of surviving Katrina had been adapted into a "case study" on surviving a hurricane, with the author's critique on what I did "right" and "wrong." Of course, I had to buy a copy of the book. I did locate the author's website and sent an e-mail but never received any response. Although flattered that my story was published, I was annoyed that the author had gotten my name wrong, never asked permission to adapt my story, and offered no comps.

Seeing this adaptation makes me wonder if other schlock writers and publishers have adapted or otherwise used my story without my knowledge. If they at least get my name correct I guess I don't much care.

So this is ten years after surviving ground zero of what is still called "the worst natural disaster in American history." Although I once called the Mississippi Gulf Coast my home, I know I could never be comfortable moving back.

The one feeling that has never escaped me, even after all these years, is a feeling of dread for the future. Super-Storms are becoming the new norm, and I firmly believe it's only a matter of time before a hurricane larger than Katrina strikes the Gulf Coast. I vividly remember, when I announced my intentions of moving to Northern Virginia, the number of people who told me "You're lucky. If I didn't have family here I'd move away too."

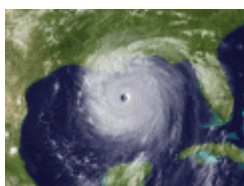
I think the many friends I left behind in Mississippi feel that same sense of dread.

*Editors Note: Cross posted to my Daily Kos diary account at [Ten Years After](#). Follow-up Note: This diary was pushed to the "Community Spotlight" section by Daily Kos editors.*

*January 7, 2016: Changed the title to be more descriptive of story contents.*

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# Katrina Two Years After



Satellite Photo – Hurricane Katrina

Today is the second anniversary of Hurricane Katrina's landfall on the Mississippi Gulf Coast. It's two years after what is now being called the greatest natural disaster to ever hit the U.S.

While Winnie and I were among the lucky ones, August 29, 2005 was still traumatic. In fact, I can honestly state it's taken this long for me to personally sort things out and take stock of how our lives have changed these past two years.

First, to put that day into proper perspective; for Winnie and I things could have been much, much worse. We were not physically hurt – just scared out of our wits. We had friends to help us get through the first terrible week afterwards. We didn't lose any family or friends to the storm. We only experienced three feet of flooding in our house, the house was not structurally damaged, and we had adequate flood insurance. I never lost any income as the company I worked for was big enough to handle their losses. I also had family support to help us out afterwards. I'm not sure my sister Melinda, and Nephew Terry, appreciate just how much getting Winnie and I out of Mississippi for even two days really meant to us.

Yes, we were lucky. So many people died that day. So many other people knew someone who died, and so many people discovered bodies in what was left of buildings. There were so many people who lost their homes completely. Even worse than losing a home completely; having their home so badly damaged they had to tear down what was left. We never even had to deal with FEMA trailers – and FEMA is in fact a four-letter word to anyone who lived on the Coast after Katrina.

So, as bizarre as it may sound, Winnie and I have a lot to be grateful for. More than anything else, I'm grateful that our marriage has survived through everything that's happened since she's been here. It was already stressful waiting those long 20 months for Winnie's visa. After she arrived, we didn't even get a break before thrown into a bigger crisis. I saw the marriages of several friends come crashing down in the months following the storm. I hate clichés, but I do believe Winnie and I have become closer for everything we've been through.

However, this is not a recommendation for disaster survival as marriage enrichment.

The biggest loss I still feel is losing "home." Not just losing our house, although I once truly loved the house I owned in Mississippi. The bigger loss is a sense of place. After thirteen years on the Coast, I felt like I belonged to a community in a way I had not felt since leaving Farmingdale, Long Island, back in 1972.

The Mississippi Gulf Coast had become home for me. I loved the small towns, the beaches, wooded areas and parks, the marshes, rivers, ocean, and all the wildlife. I had good friends there, and after the storm I felt I was accepted as a full-fledged Mississippian. I felt I had established myself within the community through my different jobs and the different community services I performed over the years.

The Coast community as it was vanished sometime after Katrina.

During the storm and immediately afterwards, most people rose to the crisis and collectively we all pulled through. But after the immediate crisis, the sense of community died. People became inwardly focused while attempting to deal with their losses and recovery, and their true inner natures were revealed. In more cases than not, it would have been better if people's inner natures had remained hidden.

It's not that I can rightfully judge other people's behavior. I'm really not sure I always acted in a way I could be proud of during those long months after the storm. I remember my bouts of uncontrolled rage as I tried to clean up and rebuild. But I can honestly say I tried my best, and did what I could to help others.

I did try to help the community by organizing a small photo exhibition through my Camera Club just before Thanksgiving, 2005. Working with several members of my club, we threw together an impromptu exhibition of Katrina photographs and promoted it as a fund-raiser. Even with the limited ability and time available to organize, we presented over 60 photographs in a prominent location in the local mall. Our club voted to absorb all the exhibit expenses.

For the entire week-long duration of the show people were continually crowded around the photos looking, talking, sometimes catching back tears and suddenly walking away. While I took my turn as "show sitter" I heard heart-wrenching stories from people who viewed the photos. Our Camera Club also took in more than \$400 dollars in donations that we immediately passed to a local charity kitchen just in time for their holiday meals program.

I like to think that this small exhibit and fundraiser helped balance out the bad karma that I later acquired during my flashes of rage.

I can say that for all the help the Coast communities received

from church groups and other organizations all over the United States afterwards, there were way too many local people doing nothing to help out. It was hard enough seeing local merchants price-gouging their fellow townspeople. It was still harder seeing some of the few people who came through unscathed ignoring their many neighbors needing help. There were way too many local churches and organizations focused only on their own needs, not reaching out to the greater community with assistance.

In the end, I lost the feeling of being part of a community. In losing my sense of community, there was nothing else to hold me there.

Winnie and I have started to build a new life for ourselves here in Northern Virginia. In many ways, this move has been kind to us. We landed a comfortable home that we could actually afford in a nice neighborhood. My job is proving to be work that I've wanted to do ever since leaving the Navy, and work that I would never have had the opportunity to perform down in Mississippi. I'm living closer to some of my family, and no further away from the rest of my family than before we moved. I only have about one-third of the belongings I had owned pre-Katrina, but it's a chance to start fresh with decorating and furnishing our new home.

Perhaps because I dumped so much water-damaged property in the trash, I don't feel the need for acquiring things the way I once did. I feel satisfied with less. I also feel more grounded in the sense that I truly believe I can handle anything thrown at me, survive, and even prosper.

But deep inside I still feel the loss.

I also have an emotional bond with the people back on the Gulf Coast in Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana still struggling to recover. I still feel deep, deep anger over the way our government abandoned us immediately after the storm. I feel



deep-seated resentment over the way our government continues to refuse help to the people needing help the most.

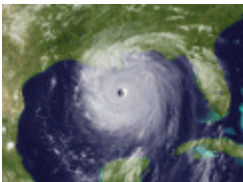
As just one example; this week I learned that Northrop-Grumman, one of our country's largest defense contractors, has now received three billion dollars (\$3,000,000,000.00) in tax money to cover their storm damages. Their storm damages actually only totaled one billion dollars, was fully insured and the insurance claims have been already paid. Meanwhile, tens of thousands of Katrina victims have still not received any federal assistance and are still fighting with their insurance companies to collect – something.

Tens of thousands of people in our country are still displaced from Katrina, still living in FEMA trailers, still attempting to rebuild and put their lives back into order. This is wrong. I'm angry about this, but I don't know how to help.

*Edited: August 31, 2014 for grammar and format*

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# **New Orleans Rebukes the President**



Satellite Photo – Hurricane Katrina

Hurricane Katrina may be ancient history for people away from the Gulf Coast. But for the people still living there the after-effects are as on-going as a wound that doesn't heal.

In New Orleans especially, the sores are wide open and festering. Today, President Bush is scheduled to visit New Orleans to give another speech and photo op. A local blog, [Humid City v2.3](#), is openly calling for a public rebuke of the President.

Text of their release follows Rebuke Bush 2pm

*JOIN THE KATRINA SURVIVORS' REBUKE OF PRESIDENT BUSH*

*2:00 PM THURSDAY MARCH 1*

*SAMUEL GREEN SCHOOL*

*2319 VALENCE ST.*

*(Near Freret and Napoleon)*

*NEW ORLEANS*

*New Orleans Needs Federal Aid, Not Presidential Photo-Ops.*

*Mr. President: Katrina Survivors Do Not Welcome You, We Rebuke You!*

*We live in a devastated city and you are a big part of the reason why it still sits in ruins. Your administration has abandoned our children by savaging their public schools. Your administration has tortured our working class people by refusing to reopen the city's public housing developments. And your administration is fully complicit in placing our uninsured in harms way by ruthlessly pursuing the privatization of local public healthcare in the aftermath of Katrina. And, finally your administration is guilty of sending our sons and daughters off to war for oil and empire just when we need them most to help us rebuild our community. Mr. President, we, Katrina Survivors all, do not welcome you to our city, we rebuke you!*

*Sponsored by Survivors Village, United Front For Affordable Housing.*

*(504) 587-0080*

[Humid City v2.3](#) is a team of bloggers local to New Orleans. Their express purpose is to disseminate Information, Culture and Opinion from the Post-K New Orleans.

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## Driving Back From New Orleans



Satellite Photo – Hurricane Katrina

I brought Aunt Rita back to the New Orleans train station yesterday for her trip back home. We arrived about 9:30, plenty early for an 11:55 departure. We said our goodbyes, then I left for home.

I had the day off but Winnie had to work, so I didn't have any big plans for the day. I decided to take the long slow way back, picking up highway 90 (Chef Menteur Highway) just outside the French Quarter so I could see more of the city and coastal Mississippi. I've taken this drive in the past, but not since Katrina swept through.

What I saw was heartbreaking. Driving through the New Orleans suburbs I would travel several blocks seeing nothing but abandoned buildings, wrecked, overgrown with weeds and plants. Then I'd spot an occupied building, neat, carefully trimmed lawn, well cared for. Then more blocks of abandoned buildings. On one block I saw a school opened with neat playgrounds right across the street from an abandoned Adult Health Center.

Further east, south of the Jazz Land Theme Park, things didn't

look any better. A commercial office building where I had once interviewed for a job was abandoned, the parking lot overgrown with weeds. Most of the small strip malls and light industrial buildings were abandoned. Most of the occupied buildings still needed major repairs.

Further east, approaching Lake Pontcharain, I spotted boats of all sizes from small fiberglass pleasure craft to large steel-hulled shrimping boats beached along the road, abandoned. Many of the commercial shipyards, servicing the commercial fishing boats, looked operational but there were wrecked boats and damaged buildings all over.

Past Lake Pontcharain the road runs between numerous bayous with elevated houses and boat marinas once lining the road. Here I saw an occasional house being rebuilt, an occasional new home going up, but many, many houses still wrecked. I saw many lots where only the pilings of a former house still existed, sometimes with a FEMA trailer on the lot. There were many boat launches full of parked trucks with empty boat trailers, and people out on the bayous fishing. But of the dozens of small marinas lining the road, I did not notice any that appeared operational.

Still further east, crossing the Pearl River, I spotted several of the [fish camps](#) lining the river here wrecked, apparently abandoned. One large fish camp was up in trees on the river bank. These fish camps were the quirky hangouts for "Louisiana River Rats" that always provided great character for the Honeywell Swamp tours. I've been on that tour twice now and loved this stretch of river for the lively waterfront communities. Now they looked dead.

Past the Pearl River I crossed into Mississippi. This was where Katrina actually made landfall with a 30 foot surge. Here, highway 90 is several miles inland from the beaches. Yet, along the highway here were more wrecked, abandoned buildings.

I crossed into Waveland and turned down the road heading to the beach. This beach area from Waveland to Bay St. Louis used to be a favorite of mine. The beaches on the south side of the road are miles of clean white sand and lots of parking locations with paved bike and walking paths. There used to be all types of houses on the north side ranging from quirky little beach shacks to elaborate mansions.

Now, all those homes were gone. There was an occasional FEMA trailer on a lot next to a foundation or set of pilings. The beaches were nearly abandoned (on Labor day) with signs warning people to stay out of the water due to submerged debris. I spotted an occasional jogger, a person sitting on the sand, a couple walking along the beach. Otherwise I saw no one on the beaches. On a "normal" Labor day these beaches would be packed with the warm shallow waters full of swimmers. This once pleasant beachfront community felt dead.

Then I came to Bay St. Louis. I had to turn off the beach road and drive north through the residential areas because the beach road here was gone. The three lane paved road along here was completely washed away with some road crews seemingly working on repairs. The neighborhoods several blocks back from the beach was more ruins, some houses occupied and repaired, many still gutted.

This is the neighborhood of Congressman Gene Taylor (D, MS), and several houses had his campaign signs on front lawns. I stayed on a road heading north, heading away from the beachfront. As I left the beachfront area more houses appeared occupied but in various stages of repair. I thought about parking and walking around, but I couldn't. I felt like an intruder here, and even a year after the storm just could not bring myself to play storm-tourist. Even driving through here felt wrong.

Then I found myself back on highway 90 going east, coming out at the eastern end of Bay St. Louis. But I could only go a

very short distance as the Bay St. Louis – Long Beach Highway 90 bridge is still gone. So I turned around and went back five miles west then north to the I-10 connection in Waveland.

I could have gone back down to Pass Christian from I-10, but by now I was too heartbroken to take any more. I drove the rest of the way home on I-10.

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## One Year After Katrina



Satellite Photo – Hurricane Katrina

*Editors Note: Cross-posted on my Daily Kos diary at [One Year After Katrina](#)*

Today is the one year anniversary of Hurricane Katrina. On this one-year anniversary, everyone here is nervously watching another potential hurricane move north hoping it hits someplace where FEMA parks don't exist.

In the past year I've learned a lot of new things such as how to gut a house, hang sheetrock, lay floor tile, build kitchen cabinets, and install windows. I've had more experiences with contractors and building supply companies than I ever thought possible, actually more than I ever wanted. I've learned the nuances of flood insurance claims, FEMA grants, Red Cross non-

assistance, and the role of private citizens in disaster relief.

This past year was a year of sharp extremes. I'm still having difficulty remembering some parts, other parts are etched in relief so sharp I can't forget. The reality of life here and life away from the Katrina coast is so extreme it's as if it's life on different planets.

I've learned how to live without refrigeration – and I'll never take crushed ice for granted again. I've listened to the most horrendous stories about surviving the flood from the most average-looking people relating their stories in a matter-of-fact way. I've experienced wonderful acts of kindness and charity from some people, and witnessed extreme acts of pure meanness from others. Having to accept help from total strangers, after a lifetime of depending only on me, has been a humbling experience.

But the hardest thing to learn was how to let go and accept losses. Not just the material losses of memorabilia and cherished possessions, and there was a lot of that. I still catch myself looking around my house and imagining it with three feet of water. Neighbors and co-workers still talk about what happened one year ago as if it was just recent. So many people are still struggling to recover. So many people are so much worse off than last year, trying to find money to rebuild when their incomes were already barely enough to get by. So many people even here are still living in trailers trying to get into permanent housing. So many people who didn't experience personal losses during the storm are still giving up their free time to help where they can.

The entire community feels different now. The losses touch everything and have become part of how we live. Even here on the edge of Katrina wrecked buildings are untouched, weeds grow around the foundations of what used to be homes, wreckage is still piled up waiting for someone to haul it all away. The

whole focus of the community is on rebuilding. You see the billboards; “Together We Rebuild.” You read it in the newspapers; “Rebuilding the Coast.” You hear it on TV; “Tips for Rebuilding.” Books are still being published “Before and After.” Construction companies with 60% non-English-speaking out-of-town crews are “The New Normal.”

The coast used to be a place of many small shops and mom-and-pop businesses. Now, so many small businesses are permanently gone, while some others have relocated. Those small businesses once created the fabric of a friendly small-town community where everyone knew everyone. Now it’s mostly the big mega-businesses that have reopened and prospered. Even though people have become closer, the small-town atmosphere is gone. I don’t see it coming back anytime soon.

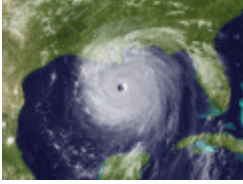
The biggest personal loss is that the coast no longer feels like the place I could live the rest of my life in. I moved here 13 years ago planning on putting down roots, after 25 years of living as a nomad. Thirteen years later and surviving the biggest natural disaster to ever hit the US, I’ve become accepted into the community. Now I’m looking around for a new place to live. The mild coastal weather and close-knit communities with the friends I’ve made no longer seem like a decent trade-off for “occasional” hurricanes.

Even though I’ve rebuilt my house, I’ve lost a home.

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## **Katrina Aftermath – PTSD and Welfare Queens**





## Satellite Photo – Hurricane Katrina

*Editor's Note: Originally posted on my diary at Daily Kos under the same [title](#) on Thursday, February 19, 2006. This is reposted here as originally written.*

I've been trying to put into diary the gauntlet of emotions I've experienced these past months in dealing with the aftermath of Katrina. Over the past few days, reading about people being evicted from FEMA hotel housing, and reading DKossian comments along the themes of "Katrina Welfare Queens," I decided I needed to write this all out.

Looking back, I now realize I have most probably gone through what is referred to as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). These past months I've experienced the periods of intense irritability, flashbacks, inability to sleep, inability to concentrate, cramps and muscle pains. But the most significant issue is that I've experienced a deep disconnect with my life as it was prior to August 29.

In so many ways, my wife and I were blessed. We came through unhurt and our house structurally undamaged although flooded. I still had a job, didn't even lose pay as my company paid for the 3 weeks it took to locate replacement office space. And we were well insured. So what's the problem, heh? I should just be able to move on, get over it, fix the house and stop complaining.

The problem is I cannot get past it, and no one I know here can either. Katrina storm day, and the days immediately following then has changed my life more than any other event I have ever experienced.

I diarized here about my experiences on storm day and the week

following, within three weeks following the storm. I subsequently revised these diaries and posted them on my personal website. Some reading this diary may remember my diaries on living through Katrina. In brief; the house we stayed in a mile from my house (thinking it was at a safe flood proof elevation) suffered three feet of flood water inside. At the storm's near-peak flood I put my wife, two other women, and two young boys on an air mattress to float in the main room of the house, while the homeowner and I swam outside for his boat preparing to evacuate. When my wife and I returned to our house after the storm we discovered it had also been flooded three feet deep, right up to the edge of our kitchen counters.

I am glad now that I wrote those diaries. You see, I can no longer remember much about what happened in the month of September.

When I go back and read these diaries, or see a store receipt dated sometime in September, it is with a sudden feeling of shock that yes, there really was a month there. It's not that I was too busy to remember what I was doing then. It is that I don't remember living through that month. It's just gone.

Then there are the flashbacks.

Ever since the storm, I have had near daily flashbacks of looking back and seeing my wife floating on the air mattress as I swam out of the house for the boat. I have a vivid flashback of seeing one of the cats up on top of a book case looking down at the rising floodwaters obviously frightened. I have another vivid flashback of seeing a cat panic and jump from a bookcase into the floodwater trying to swim away. And sometimes I have a flashback of being on the homeowner's boat out in the middle of the storm.

Another flashback I am having now isn't even a memory. I'll be standing somewhere in our nearly rebuilt house, and have a

sudden intense visualization of standing with three feet of water in the room. It is such an intense visualization I can almost feel being wet and hear the water slosh around.

The "normal" for me and everyone I know is so completely different than outside the coastal area there is no common reference point. Here, EVERY extended conversation among friends and co-workers inevitably leads to some discussion on Katrina and recovery. Everyone's life is focused around rebuilding and recovery. Everyone frequently leads discussions back to talking about the day of the storm and the weeks immediately following it. We are all constantly reliving it.

This past Christmas my wife and I visited my Mom in upstate New York. While there, I recognized that many of my Mom's friends seemed to barely remember the storm. They might be mildly curious about what my wife and I experienced, but then the conversation would move to other topics on family gatherings and social activities.

I know that those people were not uncaring about what we had been through. My Mom and many of my Mom's friends had contributed money and supplies for Katrina recovery immediately following the storm through their local church or the Red Cross. It's that there was no frame of reference for them to work with and understand what we had experienced and are continuing to experience here.

Their normal was once the normal for us here, pre-Katrina. Occasionally while rebuilding I stumble across some pictures of my house or a social event taken just prior to the storm. Seeing the picture always creates a shock, like a jolt of electricity running through me, thinking how different my life was just a few short months ago.

Then there is the issue of receiving donated relief supplies. Until Katrina, I had never in my entire life asked for or received a penny's worth of anything I hadn't first worked for

and earned. But I did accept charity donations after Katrina. In the first weeks following the storm donated relief supplies were often the only supplies available. I also accepted the money and supplies that my family (including my young nieces and nephews) and friends sent us.

Driving back from New York this past Christmas my wife and I stopped for the night outside of Durham, North Carolina. During supper at a local restaurant we started a pleasant conversation with our waitress. At some point she asked us where we were from. When we told her, and she learned we had been through Katrina, she immediately insisted on paying for our meal. I suspect our bill was equivalent to several hours of her work.

When this waitress insisted on paying for our meals, on top of all the donations we had accepted over the previous months, I started to cry in shame. I think that being in a position to need help from anyone, especially total strangers, has been the most humiliating experience I could ever have imagined.

Besides suffering from my own losses, I am also feeling what I have to describe as "Survivor's Guilt." As bad as my wife and I were impacted, our experiences are not as bad as many others around us. When I'm talking with someone who had a worse experience than mine (worse storm day experience than mine, lost their home and no flood insurance, lost a close friend or family member to the flood, found a body after the waters receded) I feel guilt at getting off "so easy."

Yes, being in a house in three feet of flood water, losing about 70% of what I once owned, and spending every possible minute since Aug 30 rebuilding my home, with the completion still a long ways away, is relatively minor compared to the losses of so many other people here on the Mississippi Coast. And I know my experiences are nothing like the horrors of what so many people over in New Orleans have gone through these past months.

Now we are less than six months from the start of hurricane season. I'm not the only person here making jokes about preparing my house for the next flooding. There is a strong line of black humor running through many conversations these days from everyone I know. For me, this black humor is my attempt to cover the continuous undercurrent of fear and helplessness at what may happen this next hurricane season. Or the next hurricane season. Or the hurricane season after that.

My point in writing all this? It's about reading comments, diaries and news stories about how Katrina victims need to just "get on with it." "Get past it." "Move on, rebuild." And worse, the many implications that people who are continuing to ask for federal and private assistance are somehow taking advantage of this situation.

I know some folks here are attempting to take advantage of Katrina aid for personal gain. A close friend intends to stay in her rent-free FEMA trailer as long as she possibly can. She was living in a rental house that flooded during Katrina and was subsequently evicted by the landlord. She's a single parent working two minimum-wage jobs raising two kids and no child support. Her older daughter is a junior in high school taking advanced placement courses pulling straight A's and wants to go to a good engineering college.

Living in the FEMA trailer rent-free is the first chance my friend has had in many years to actually save money for her daughter's college fund. Yes, she's gaming the system. Go ahead and criticize her for taking advantage of Katrina aid. Then shut up.

Everyone who has been through this is dealing with the aftereffects differently. Some are more able to cope than others. Some have different ways of trying to move on and build a better future for themselves and their families.

But my bottom line is that NOBODY who has not lived through

this experience has the right to criticize the subsequent actions of those who did. If that pisses anybody off, tough. Get past the “Katrina Welfare Queens” syndrome. If you don’t care enough to help, fine. Say so, and then get out of the way of the victims and those who are trying to help.

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## Katrina Aftermath – The Mississippi Numbers



Satellite Photo – Hurricane Katrina

*Editor’s Note: First posted on Daily Kos under the same [title](#) on February 16, 2006. I attempted to do some six month out research on the actual impact of Katrina on the national economy, based on published news sources. This post contains fair-use excerpts from various news sources, with linked references.*

From today’s edition of our local Knight-Ridder newspaper [The Sun Herald](#) comes this timely front page editorial [MISSISSIPPI’S INVISIBLE COAST](#)

The editorial’s lede:

*“As Aug. 29 recedes into the conscious time of many Americans, the great storm that devastated 70 miles of Mississippi’s Coast, destroying the*

*homes and lives of hundreds of thousands, fades into a black hole of media obscurity.*

*Never mind that, if taken alone, the destruction in Mississippi would represent the single greatest natural disaster in 229 years of American history. The telling of Katrina by national media has created the illusion of the hurricane's impact on our Coast as something of a footnote."*

The article puts the continuing disaster of New Orleans in proper perspective:

*"The awful tragedy that befell New Orleans as a consequence of levee failures at the time of Katrina, likewise, taken by itself, also represents a monumental natural disaster. But, of course, the devastation there, and here, were not separate events, but one, wrought by the Aug. 29 storm."*

To put a better perspective on the extend of Katrina storm damage, we are talking more than **140 miles** of coastal area in complete destruction from this storm. **140 miles** of people rebuilding their homes, their lives, their businesses, and otherwise attempting to recover from their losses.

*The Sun Herald* asks a question:

*"Could it be possible that the ongoing story of an Alabama teenager missing in Aruba has received more coverage on some cable networks than*

*all of the incredibly compelling stories of courage, loss and need of untold thousands of Mississippians? Maybe a lot more coverage?"*

Here is a the current statistics of Katrina related losses for Mississippi. Note that there was damage further upstate from this hurricane that is not even reflected in these statistics. If coastal Mississippi is invisible, the upstate Mississippi area is a black hole – there was tornado and wind related damages at least as far north as the city of Jackson, in the center of the state.

Note that damages from Hurricane Rita is also included in insurance claims. Hurricane Rita, sweeping through a few weeks after Katrina, is another black hole completely lost in the chaos caused by Katrina. By rights, Rita should have been considered a major hurricane – the storm surge at my home was about 7 feet, tying with 2002's Hurricane Lily for the third highest surge (after Katrina and hurricane George in 1998) it has ever been since I've lived here.

Katrina's Numbers for Mississippi:

***\$125 billion:** Estimated dollar amount of damage caused by Hurricane Katrina*

***231:** Identified dead statewide*

***5:** Unidentified dead*

***67:** Missing*

***65,380:** Houses in South Mississippi destroyed*

***383,700:** Mississippi insurance claims filed (Katrina and Rita)*

***\$5 billion:** Claims paid (as of Nov. 21)*

***141,000:** Insurance claims filed in South Mississippi*

***\$1.3 billion:** Claims paid in South Mississippi*

***44 million:** Estimated cubic yards of debris in South Mississippi*



*21.8 million: Cubic yards removed as of Dec. 5*  
*20,447: Red Cross staff and volunteers in Mississippi*  
*5,543,006: Red Cross meals served*  
*42,768: People sheltered by Red Cross*  
*229: Red Cross shelters opened*  
*\$185 million: Red Cross money spent in South Mississippi as of Nov. 30*

Some more Katrina numbers:

**\$5.2 billion:** Amount of federal aid money in the recent Katrina relief package earmarked for housing reconstruction in Mississippi

([Source](#))

**\$2.116 billion :** Amount of money the Red Cross has raised in donations and pledges for Katrina Relief efforts as of Feb 3.

**80% :** Amount of this money the Red Cross claims to have spent on total Katrina relief efforts as of Dec 31, 2005.

([Source](#))

**40,000:** Requests for FEMA trailers in Mississippi as of Feb 9

**34,560:** Requests met in Mississippi as of Feb 9.

([Source](#))

**10,770** FEMA trailers staged in Hope, Arkansas awaiting to be delivered (many of which are now damaged from improper storage)

**\$431 million:** Cost of these trailers in taxpayer dollars

([Source](#))

**379:** Number of pages in the House Select Committee's report on Hurricane Katrina.

**(202) 226-5200** Phone number to call an order a copy, if you are unable to [download it from the House Website](#).

([Source](#))

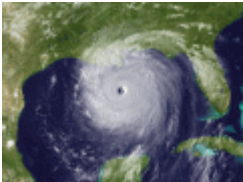
And the final number is **104** – Number of days before the next

hurricane season officially starts.

*Note: Edited August 29, 2014 for format and grammatical errors.*

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# Katrina Aftermath Day 63 – Life in Chaos



Satellite Photo – Hurricane Katrina

*Editor's Note: This article was first published on Daily Kos as [Katrina Aftermath Day 63: Life in Chaos](#) on Oct 31, 2005.*

My wife and I have been busy these past few weeks trying to close in our house with insulation, drywall, and new windows before cold weather sets in. I realize for most people reading this, 60 degree weather doesn't seem very cold, but down here on the coast it does mean winter. Warm weather is the trade-off we have for putting up with hurricanes – which until two months ago seemed like a decent trade.

After two months of living in the chaos caused by Katrina recovery, I want to share an observation that I think makes the dynamics of recovery here on the Mississippi Gulf coast completely different than that of New Orleans. My observation is that unlike New Orleans, where it was the poorer people who disproportional suffered, here the wealthy people suffered as much as or even more than poorer people.

While the storm surge and flooding extended well inland, it was the beach-front coastal areas where only foundations (or maybe not even those) were left standing. This was the more expensive properties predominantly occupied by the wealthier people in our communities – Doctors, Lawyers, Judges, Senior Corporate Executives, Town and City Mayors, Congressman Gene Taylor, Senator Trent Lott, etc. Further inland, homes were flooded (as was mine) but otherwise largely undamaged.

In other words, while every doctor in the town of Ocean Springs is currently living in a trailer, my wife and I are still living in our home, even though making repairs.

I have heard that Sen. Trent Lott has become personally involved in dealing with FEMA issues – some people had trailers delivered to their properties only to wait weeks for a contractor to hookup services (electricity, water, sewage) and then get the keys turned over. One contractor who was hired to setup trailers early on lost all the keys, leaving trailers ready for occupancy but locked tight. FEMA's answer to people calling asking how to get in was "Get the serial number from the inside of the trailer door and we'll send replacement keys." Sen. Lott was able to get this issue fixed.

My wife and I are doing as much of our home repairs ourselves as we can, both to save money and because contractor services are nearly impossible to get. My wife has shown an unexpected talent for hanging drywall even though she had never worked with it before. In the part of China she grew up in all the homes are made of concrete with tile roofs. As we proceed with tearing out and replacing walls and floors, my wife frequently reminds me that if we had been flooded in a Chinese-built house all we'd need to do is wash it out and buy new furniture.

There are about 680,000 families in Mississippi all trying to repair their homes all at the same time we are, so building supplies are in big demand. Local stores are doing their best

to keep up with demand, but there is only so much they can do. Just one example: Everyone who was flooded (and still has walls standing) needs drywall.

For several weeks now, the two Lowes Home Improvement Centers has been selling out entire truckloads of drywall in under six hours. I made ten trips over three weeks to purchase drywall, twice successfully but not still able to get as much as I needed. A nephew up in Tennessee finally brought down the remainder of what we needed. But we are making progress and moving up the technology ladder of living conveniences.

Refrigeration happened two weeks ago – not having to scavenge for ice every two days was wonderful. It took better than three weeks for Sears to get our 'fridge delivered, even after I had a personal chat with the delivery manager. As frustrated as I was waiting for a 'fridge I had already paid for (while continuing to scavenge for ice) I couldn't help feeling sorry for the delivery manager. She explained they contracted out all appliance deliveries to a third party company, and when Hurricane Rita approached the entire company shut down and evacuated for a full week.

So now I own a small utility trailer and do the "Cash-and-carry routine to avoid waiting for deliveries. Other contractor services are equally difficult to obtain. And it is the local, well-established companies that seem most likely to not return phone calls or provide price-gouging estimates. After calling six local plumbing companies, I finally obtained service – from a plumber who came down from Tennessee. After weeks of calling contractors for window repairs, I finally received a callback from another out-of-area contractor.

Getting my A/C system replaced has been my biggest disappointment. The A/C Company I have done business with for six years only sent their rep out after my fourth call to give an estimate. The estimate this rep provided was so outrageously inflated (warning hint was when he asked if I had

flood insurance – I do – before making the estimate) I found another company.

I can't help but think that when all hurricane repairs are done, many local companies are going to get a come-uppance. I see private out-of-area contractors as the backbone of commercial recovery efforts here. My nephew from Tennessee (the one who brought us drywall) works for a roofing company that "follows the storm circuit." He spent most of last year in Florida, was here on the coast the day after Katrina came through, and is now going back to Florida to check on Hurricane Wilma damages. He is part of a growing industry of building contractors that specialize in storm repairs and follow the storm circuits: Florida to Louisiana to Mississippi and Alabama back to Florida again.

But it's not just home repairs that are big business now. There were tens of thousands of cars destroyed by floodwaters here on the coast, which translates into brisk cars sales from Gulf Coast Residents over a three-state area (Tennessee, Alabama, and Florida). Which also means the local DMV, which itself is operating out of temporary office space while their building is repaired, is way backlogged with new registrations. I recently waited over one hour in line to register the trailer I purchased, and then waited 10 minutes to renew the registration on my storm-surviving vehicle.

But it is the out-of-area volunteers helping out that have touched me most, and left the greatest positive impact. My neighbor has so far had two groups of out-of-area volunteers in to help her replace drywall. One group was comprised of executives from the Virginia Beach, Virginia, area who traveled here at their own expense just to help out, working through their local church. They spent three days dry walling my neighbor's house, just one of several they worked on during the two weeks they were here.

Another friend had a group of eleven people (traveled down

from Indiana via their church) come in to clean out his house. They pulled out damaged drywall and carpets, ruined furniture and appliances, yard debris which included tree limbs, bricks, lumber, and roof sections from neighboring homes, in less than one day. Multiply these two examples by 1000's and you can get the feel for how many coast people are being helped by out-of-area volunteers who travel here at their own expense just to help us out.

And people from all over the country are continuing to send us supplies. This level of help is humbling to me. I am continually reminded of how fortunate my wife and I are as I hear horror story after horror story of how people who stayed here during the storm managed to survive. As bad as "Storm Day" was for us, so many others had it so much worse.

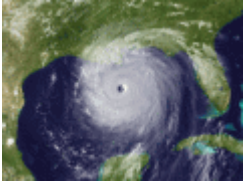
I do not know a single person here on the coast that has not been touched in some way by this storm. Even people whose homes were relatively untouched now have family or friends living with them who were made homeless. Every time I visit someone whose home is undamaged I have a momentary feeling of disorientation. It may sound odd, but after days of being around homes that are gutted, with the contents piled out by the curb for trash pickup, walking into an undamaged home is a brief touch of normalcy. It's a brief moment of what life was like for me up to 64 days ago, but it feels like a lifetime.

The only way I can describe the damages here to people who have not been here is to explain: Take the worse storm damage picture you have seen, and multiply it by 60 miles.

*Note: Edited on August 29, 2014 for format and grammatical errors.*

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# Katrina Report – Democrats Screw Up Again



Satellite Photo – Hurricane Katrina

*Editor's Note: This diary was first posted on Daily Kos as [Katrina Report: Democrats Screw Up Again](#) on Thursday Oct 06, 2005. I consider this both a Katrina diary, and a political-oriented rant against the Democratic Party. In reviewing this diary, I think it again gives a good idea of the conditions here on the coast, and reflects the already tepid interest the rest of the US was showing towards Katrina recovery – as in, not much.*

One on-going commentary I read is that the Democratic Party never misses an opportunity to miss an opportunity. Well, with the on-going cleanup and relief efforts for Hurricane Katrina, I see the Democratic party missing an opportunity.

I write this after receiving two bulk-rate fundraising letters this past week. To put these letters into proper context: Some of my friends are still living in tents, campers parked in their driveways or in houses without interior walls (as my wife and I are). No one down here is much concerned about anything other than repairing storm damages and relief efforts. Many people are upset by the lack of response from federal disaster agencies, insurance companies refusing to pay out claims, and standing in hours-long lines to get ANY amount of relief assistance.

The first letter I received early this week was a standard fund-raising piece from the DNC asking for pledges to help

fight the “Radical Right Wing Agenda of the Bush Administration.” This first letter really irritated me. I mean, GOOD %^\$#@\* GOD PEOPLE, couldn't the SOMEONE in the DNC match Katrina disaster area zip codes against their mailing list?

Isn't there ONE FRIGGING PERSON in the DNC who thought it might not be a good idea to ask for campaign contributions from someone living in a tent?

At least, if the DNC really felt a need to send out letters, isn't there ONE STRATEGIST somewhere in the DNC that thought to tie the fiasco of government hurricane relief efforts into a pitch on republican incompetence and corruption?

To compound my irritation, yesterday I received a fund raising letter with survey from Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton. Her cover letter explained what a good listener she was and how the most important part of being a senator was knowing how to listen to the needs and concerns of the people Yada, Yada, Yada. Then the letter went into a fundraising pitch and asked me to fill out a survey indicating my five most important concerns.

The survey options were the usual laundry list of Democratic issues; Economy, Tax Cuts, Reproductive Rights, Separation of Church and State, etc. After looking through them, I realized that not one of the items listed were on my list of most pressing issues. So, seeing as Senator Clinton is such a good listener and wants to know our concerns, I've decided to tell her.

Senator, here is a sample list of issues that people living on the Gulf Coast might currently be interested in:

1. “Finding a job to replace the one I had lost to hurricane Katrina damage.”
2. “Moving out of the family tent into someplace with heat



before the start of Winter.”

3. “Moving out of the Red Cross shelter into anyplace else before the shelter closes.”
4. “Getting food when relief supplies end and I still haven’t found a new job.”
5. “Making contact with the Red Cross or FEMA to file for disaster relief money.”
6. “Receiving disaster relief money after I file with the Red Cross and FEMA.”
7. “Getting my children back into school.”
8. “Raising money to level what is left of my old home and rebuild.”
9. “Getting an Insurance Adjustor to File My Claim.”
10. “Being Allowed Back to My Home to Recover Whatever I Can.”
11. “Why it took so long for any government-associated disaster relief group to show up.”

I’m sure focus groups could give you some additional listening points, senator.

So to the DNC, Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton, and any other democrat thinking of sending out a form letter asking for campaign contributions: Make the RNC smile. Do their work for them, show people just how out of touch the Democratic party is with the needs of average people. Some suggestions include:

– Send a form letter pitching for “\$100.00, \$50.00, \$25.00, or amount Other” to a family living in a tent next to the concrete slab that was once their house, wondering how to get their tomorrow’s dinner.

– Talk about separation of Church and State to a person living in a Church-provided shelter, living on food provided by a church-sponsored relief effort. Especially talk about separation of church and state to the people in church shelters who have yet to see ANY federal relief money.

- Talk about Reproductive Rights to a person who just stood in a Red Cross Disaster relief line for 5 hours, hoping to receive \$335.
- Talk about tax relief to a person who lost their job to hurricane Katrina damages, and has no idea where they might work next.
- Talk about Health Care and Medicare to a family who lost medical coverage when they lost their job. But since people's health needs might be focused on the immediate needs of replacing lost blood pressure medication, be sure to talk about abstract qualities such as choice of health care providers.

So, please folks, just go right on missing opportunities.

End of Rant

*Editor's Comment: In the comments section of my Daily Kos diary, one person wrote that they forwarded this to the DNC. I did not see any more fundraising letters from either the DNC or Senator Clinton afterwards, so maybe this diary actually did some good.*

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## **Katrina's Financial Impact**



Satellite Photo – Hurricane Katrina

*Editor's Note: This was cross-published at Daily Kos as*

[Katrina Financial Impact](#) on Friday Sep 30, 2005. This was a combination of research on published news sources and my own first-hand research.

I'm picking up some rather interesting feelers concerning the pending economic impact from hurricane Katrina. None of my feelers is good news for the Gulf Coast, and I do believe there will be a negative national impact, despite what bu\$hco is claiming.

Here in Jackson country alone, I've heard estimates that of the 132,000 families here prior to the storm 100,000 have homes (apartments, mobile homes, single family structures) that are severely damaged or uninhabitable. Along the Mississippi Gulf Coast, approximately 330,000 homes were destroyed to the point of being uninhabitable, with approximately 680,000 more homes suffering some type of storm damage. This totals about two thirds of all homes on the Mississippi coast.

Added to this is the damage to commercial properties, roads, railway tracks, and bridges. In Biloxi the casinos alone accounted for 17,000 jobs – and all the casinos are presently shut down. The Gulfport commercial seaport is still out-of-operation and cargo delivered prior to the storm is rotting in the warehouses.

The shipyards around Pascagoula are getting back in production, but still limping along surviving on insurance monies while they retool. The shipyard I work at took a 25 foot tidal surge, and saltwater damage is insidious. Roads and railway lines that business depends on are damaged and time estimates on repairing some bridges are 2 to 3 years.

The bulk of all property damage was caused by hurricane wind-induced storm surge, what the insurance folks are calling flooding and only paying claims against a flood insurance policy. But many locations that flooded were not considered

“flood zones” (as my neighborhood was not) and the residents were not required to maintain flood insurance. So very many people did not carry flood insurance (as almost all the people living in my neighborhood did not). Now, many, many people have homes wrecked and no insurance coverage to help pay for reconstruction (I estimate two-thirds of my town alone was flooded).

But there will still be hundreds of thousands of insurance claims paid out from Katrina. Insurance companies are a major source of capital to banks and corporations. With this hit to insurance revenues, where does the capital come from? I also expect homeowner and flood insurance rates to dramatically increase as a result of this storm.

To repair a flooded home means replacing all electrical appliances, replacing insulation and sheet-rock (at least the lower 4 feet, all of it if the flood line was greater than 3 feet deep), carpeting and wood flooring, possibly replacing electrical wiring and fixtures, repainting and decorating, and replacing most or all of the furniture. But before any reconstruction can be done, the interior structure must be properly treated to kill mold and prevent future mold growth. All this work is expensive – do the numbers on how much this would cost you.

Without insurance money, people are left financing major home reconstruction out-of-pocket. They're already carrying a mortgage and paying property taxes. They may have lost their job, or only able to work reduced hours / reduced pay.

Will a home that has once been flooded, even if professionally treated for mold (there are very few state-certified mold treatment firms, and very little guidance on how to do it “properly”) be appraised for sale price the same as a non-flooded home? Enough homes in a neighborhood with reduced appraisals will affect appraisals of the non-flooded homes.

Will a person unable to afford reconstruction be willing to pay their mortgage or property taxes? Given a choice between living in a tent in their driveway or walking away from a wrecked home, what will people do? A home is the major source of equity for many people – what happens if their equity is suddenly reduced below what their mortgage is?

What happens to a bank when large numbers of customers default on their mortgages?

With lower property appraisals, what happens to the town's tax base? What happens to a town when large numbers of residents abandon their property?

What happens to towns that lose their tax base? Where do they get the money to finance schools and public services? The Mississippi Gulf Coast encompasses most of the non-farm industries for the entire state. The loss of Mississippi Coast tax revenue means a significant state-wide loss of tax revenue. I've heard that the Casino industry alone accounted for one billion dollars in state tax revenue that is lost for at least a year.

Gov Barbour is already expressing concern. He just eliminated 25,000 people from Medicaid rolls and now the numbers of state residents who need health care services, but can't afford it themselves, is skyrocketing. State school funding was already short and people were demanding a major funding increase.

Home construction has been the growth engine driving our economy for the past several years. Now consider the multiple impacts of increasing prices of construction materials due to increased demand on top of increased energy prices. Mortgage rates increase as a result of more expensive capital and higher bank losses? Increased homeowner insurance rates will increase the price of home mortgages. The southeast has been one of the fastest-growing regions for new home construction.

The economic impact of hurricane Katrina is just now starting

to be assessed, and I do not think any of it is good news for our country.