

## A Flood of Change

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Everyone knew that a large storm was heading to New Orleans, but how often had everyone been through this routine? Even in my short life I had been through it multiple times. So everyone thought there would just be a lot of rain, some minor flooding, and some wind damage. And for a while everyone was right. Then the levees failed catastrophically and suddenly what should have been a week away from home became two months away. And hurricane Katrina became the most costly and one of the deadliest natural disasters in the history of the United States of America.

We hadn't even planned on being away for a storm. The storm hit on Labor Day weekend, and we just happened to be in Destin that weekend, which was the original destination of the storm. As a result, all we had brought with us were three days of clothes and our dog, but we did get to miss all of the evacuation traffic.

So we were hanging out in Destin, watched the storm make landfall, and then pass the city, and everything seemed ok. Then by a miracle of failed engineering and corrupt politics the levees failed and then by a not so uncommon act of political idiocy, the cities pumps got destroyed and everyone quickly realized that no one would be going back for quite some time.

So we were at the beach, and that seemed like a reasonable place to spend a few months so we stayed. We had been in my grandmother's condo, and we decided to stay there, as it wouldn't cost us anything. The condo is a small little place with an open den area, two bedrooms, two bathrooms, a kitchen and a small loft with a few beds. In this space were seven people and two dogs, but hey, it was better than what a lot of people got. We then found a school, which had just opened three weeks earlier, to attend. Now I truly feel sorry for this school; you see Destin is the place where New Orleans people go to vacation, so this school, which wasn't even properly set up yet, got something like 200 new students. Out of these new students, something like 7 of those people were some of my friends and me, which was nice. The school was a joke; none of us tried the slightest bit but got straight A's. I'm not insinuating that we were more intelligent than the people in Destin, but simply that the school we had been put through prepared us much better than did the schools in Destin. So eventually I dropped out, my mom decided that it was a waste of time for me to attend school. We eventually went to New Jersey for a while and hung out with my uncle, we even considered staying, but after looking around for a while realized that that was not economically feasible. And finally, after having been away from home for a couple months we went back to New Orleans.

We stayed in New Orleans for another year and a half, with the intentions of staying forever and watching the city rebuild. But after some time we realized this wasn't going to happen the way we had hoped. Things weren't getting done on the schedule they were supposed to, prices on everything were rising, and worst of all Mayor Ray Nagin got reelected to a second term. This criminal who had destroyed a city sent busses around the city to pick people up, feed them, and then bring them to the polling station to vote for him. On top of being corrupt beyond

belief, something the federal government now seems to recognize (as they are investigating him), he is also a political fool, for evidence of this one only needs to listen to his Martin Luther King Day Chocolate City speech.

The most difficult thing about the experience was being in a new environment. It taught us how to adapt, forced us to meet new people in unfamiliar circumstances, and how to get used to new living conditions. In addition I had never spent a long period of time living in cramped conditions. The overall result of those things is that I became able to walk into a new place and be able to just take it all in stride, something that came in handy when we eventually moved to Georgia.

One of the greatest changes to me as a person though, was that I suddenly built up an interest in politics. Through my experiences during Katrina I gained a realization that politics have a direct effect on me, at all levels. Had politicians acted properly the damage from the hurricane would have been well within acceptable ranges. But that was after years of awful corruption and decision making. But then after the storm politicians made a slurry of bad decisions. One in particular sticks out for me, not because it had the largest effect, or because it was highly corrupt (so far as I know), but rather because of how obvious of a mistake it was. A lot of people's roofs were damaged due to the hurricane. So the government, in its infinite wisdom, decided to pay for all of the broken roofs to have a tarp placed on them, these became known as blue roofs. However, the cost to put a tarp on a roof and the cost to permanently repair or replace the roof was about the same for most roofs. So you would say to yourself, it must have been an issue of time. And you would be wrong; I saw houses that had their entire roofs replaced

faster than they had the tarps installed on only a portion. The insane amount of money that could have been saved had roofs just been replaced initially blows my mind. As a result of general stupidity and a lot of very obvious corruption, after Katrina I began to follow what politicians were doing and how their actions affected me. It's made me much more aware of the world around me, and has shown me that it is up to everyone, including me, to take part in our democratic process.

In the end, my journey to Destin and then the general aftermath of Katrina, has changed me, and made me stronger. I am capable of meeting new people and surviving in less comfortable than normal surroundings, and I now have a different view of the world, and care more about the activities of our government.