

Chapter 17

Paradise to Peril: Humanistic Uncertainty during Hurricanes Isaac and Katrina

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ABSTRACT

This is a brief personal account of the human failures and social impacts from hurricane Katrina as contrasted with the improved risk management planning in advance of Hurricane Isaac. This paper is a unique first person account of a disaster. It presents the authors personal experiences during the hurricane.

INTRODUCTION

This is a risk-related crisis event review of hurricane Isaac, or rather; it is a unique personal account of the disaster. I am a survivor of hurricane Katrina, which also struck New Orleans LA exactly seven years ago.

DISCUSSION

Hurricane Isaac poured two feet of rain in Slidell, LA, amid reports of 14-25 inches falling per hour in and around New Orleans which is just about one

mile across Lake Pontchartrain. Dr Jeff Masters CEO of Weather Underground (2012, August 31, email) said that “Audubon Park [in New Orleans] recorded 18.7 inches of rain in a 24-hour period the highest dating to 1871.” The diameter of Isaac was over 175 miles.

It was not the rain which was my downfall, but rather a quirk of Mother Nature that brought strong southeast winds causing a storm surge from Lake Pontchartrain directed to Slidell. As seen in Figure 1, my backyard was now a two-foot deep pool. Luckily, the main part of the house was not flooded.

I had decided to ride out Isaac, which registered as a category 1 hurricane when it hit us on August 29 at 6am (NOAA, 2012). I stayed only because

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Figure 1. Paradise to peril, my house with a lovely water view (army patrol helicopter overhead)



I had already survived hurricane Katrina which was a category 3 when it hit. Isaac was not as bad as Katrina was even though I lost only roof shingles in 2005. My story is concerns the humanistic perspective of uncertainty and not about the risk of winds or flooding.

This time around in 2012, things were organized. People were being picked up by US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) and taken to a processing center at a nearby church or school then bused to state shelters outside our parish. That is if they wished to leave. Since the water rose so quickly, destroyed both food, and shorted the electricity, most had no choice but to leave. I had a portable toilet and adequate supplies, and my girlfriend had already left for Tulsa OK the day before for business - so I stayed put.

According to NOAA (2012), over 3,000 people were evacuated. This time though the eight-foot high levees held, whereas in 2005 they failed. According to popular reports, the City of New Orleans spent \$14.5 billion to rebuild the levees and floor control systems - and this time they worked. Early reports from FEMA (2012, September 30) were that the insurance claims reached \$2 billion at this point. This may be compared to Katrina which cost \$102 billion. Although the death toll from Isaac was 24 in Haiti, there were no direct fatalities to my knowledge in this area (the mayor stated there was a report of one fatality but that

was never confirmed). Katrina on the other hand resulted in 1836 deaths (LDHH, 2012).

Ironically, on this same date in August 29, 2005 hurricane Katrina struck New Orleans as a category 3. Katrina destroyed 80% of New Orleans due to flooding, with surge waters reaching inland 12 miles. In 2005 the USACE were held responsible for the levee system failing since they were the designers and builders of it, as mandated by the Flood Control Act of 1965, but they were not held legally accountable.

In 2005 there seemed to be no police control during the Katrina disaster. I had two boats then in 2005. I used my aluminum skiff to rescue people and to gather supplies from the FEMA shelters in 2005 and 2012. The second boat was a schooner paradoxically christened Isaacs (perhaps it was an evil omen) which was partially destroyed by hurricane Katrina in 2005 (see Figure 2).

Sadly, I saw Katrina bring out the worst in people, perhaps in repentance against mother nature's onslaught. I saw over 30 dead bodies floating in the now-toxic waters shortly after August 30, 2005. I heard from my friends about elderly humans dying in their attics because they ran out of medication or oxygen but no one came to rescue them. I saw broken families with their sick children and babies living for almost a week in 100 F weather within makeshift shelters. The worst was that gangs of armed youths roamed,

Figure 2. Paradise to peril, my boat Isaacs the schooner beached by Katrina



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