

## Letting go

Hurricane season. We all have different reactions to its arrival. Fear, anxiety, ambivalence and if you work for the Weather Channel, what *seems* to be unbridled excitement. I know they don't mean anyone any harm, but it is really difficult not to hear the excitement in the voice of a reporter as they explain the level of devastation your community is about to experience from a storm that has the same name as that aunt of yours who always smelled a little funny.

Even though hurricane preparedness is serious business, some of us seem to follow our own personal unpreparedness plan, which generally seems to consist of: 1. Wait until the wind is blowing hard. 2. Freak out. 3. Rush to the grocery store and buy canned food that you would never eat... normally. 4. Go to the hardware store and buy all the plywood... for reasons that are unclear even to you.

As far as our level of awareness, we can't seem to find a balance between obsessing over the tropical storm that just formed in Africa and procrastinating about putting our shutters up for the Category 4 that is a day away and has us in its cone-shaped sights. I suppose part of the problem is that it can be hard to know how to react realistically to this particular threat unless you have experienced it before. But then, even those of us who have been through a really bad hurricane tend to forget what it is really like and what is at risk.

In my case, the hurricane was named Donna. It was a strangely pleasant name for such a deadly hurricane. Donna was the "Welcome Wagon" that greeted my family to Bonita Springs in 1960 by going directly over the top of this little community like a freight train. Yes, that is taking it kind of personally... but although it's different for everyone, a deadly storm leaves its mark inside of you.

I was six years old and my first clue that something was wrong was in my parent's actions. There wasn't much discussion... just frantic activity. I gather there was not a great deal of advanced warning in the early 60's so, most people only had a matter of hours to prepare. It wasn't long before my sister and I were huddled in the living room listening to the angry wind howl and watching the tarpaper fly off the roof. By the light of a hurricane lantern, my mom, who was five months pregnant with my brother Tim, was working frantically, helping my dad keep the roof on the house. They were both climbing up and down ladders nailing hurricane clips to the roof of the unfinished building that housed our home and the family hardware store. The ceiling was unfinished, so you could watch the roof "breathe" up and down several inches as the storm tore at the roof. It was obvious to my parents, but not to us, that Donna wanted to take us. But they were not about to let us go without a fight.

When the eye of the storm arrived my father quickly surveyed the damage and found that an outside door had blown off. So he grabbed a large piece of plywood and headed mightily down the long hallway towards the gaping hole and the quickly increasing winds. Just as he approached the opening, without warning Donna

declared “time in” and with an 80 mile per hour gust of wind, picked up my 200 lb. father and his 4’ x 8’ plywood “hurricane surf board” and blew him 70 feet back down the hallway. Although this looked like great fun to me, the look in his eyes assured me that it was not. My Dad, being a persistent fellow, took several more rides up and down the hallway before deciding that he had had enough windsurfing and that this storm was intent on taking his life and his families if he didn’t move them to a safer place... now.

Right behind the store sat my grandparents old cracker shack made of lighter pine with a tin roof. Before the storm could come back up to full speed, we quickly made our way over and safely sat out the rest of the storm. Our home and the store were severely damaged, but amazingly the little shack suffered nothing more than a single leak in the roof. I wish that old shack were still there. I would like to return the favor.

Although I now recognize what a close call this was, I don’t remember at that time ever being afraid or feeling at risk. I was fascinated at the power of the storm and I constantly sat too close to the windows so that I could watch the trees fly by and small houses roll past like cardboard boxes. Now when a storm visits Bonita, I still can’t resist watching the fury and power of a hurricane. It is amazing.

I am well aware of the tragedy and the trauma that these storms have wrought on so many people and I understand that there is certainly nothing glorious about their loss and suffering. But I think I also understand that excitement in the voice of the weatherman as the season approaches... a hurricane is a remarkable and humbling display of nature’s power. When Mother Nature flexes her muscles, she demands our attention, respect, and our vigilance. So, be prepared, stay calm, and remember... just let go of the plywood.