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Shocked into Growth

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Vivi An Vo

Shocked Into Growth

I have lived in New Orleans for my entire life. To me, a hurricane was a common and enjoyable occurrence, that is, if you were not in the storm. My family always evacuated for any and every hurricane that came near the Louisiana coast. For six-year-old me, “evacuation” would not be the right word to describe hurricane season. Instead I considered it an impromptu vacation season, by which I mean that if there were a hurricane, then my family got to go on a vacation in the middle of the school year. I did not understand the violent power of a hurricane when I was younger. I had never before seen New Orleans get hit by a category-five hurricane, so I did not understand the potential destructive power of Hurricane Katrina.

My family evacuated just like for every other hurricane, and I thought nothing of the constant newscasts. I did not understand my parents’ grim look as they aired images of the winds and flood. Katrina seemed to be just like every other hurricane that had passed New Orleans before 2005. BOY! WAS I WRONG! The people around me in Houston, where I evacuated to, pitied me, and I did not understand why. Only when we were able to return home to New Orleans did I understand. My city was in ruins. Hurricane Katrina left my new house, which we only lived in for two years, battered. Katrina flooded half of my grandparents’ house and left a strong moldy odor in the dead air. The storm caused my parents’ grocery store in the Garden District to be flooded and looted. We were financially incapable of repairing two houses and a business at one time. We had to let our business go, and lost our only source of income. The small amount of FEMA money we got went to repairing and restoring my grandparents’ house. My parents sold our new home that my father worked so hard on to refurbish two years prior.

We sold it at a low price so that we were able to survive and continue restoring my grandparents' house.

Eleven years later, I do not hate Katrina for turning my life upside down. My family was able to survive and get back on our feet. I am grateful for that and all that I have now. To know feelings of loss and helplessness was a shock, but later inspired growth for my family. We learned to thank God for what we have, and take great solace in the fact that we still had each other and were able to get through the hardship intact. I learned to try to understand and sympathize with others whose post--Katrina aftermath was much more devastating than my own. I keep the lessons Katrina taught me and try to build upon them everyday. Though I did miss having the grocery store I grew up in, the dream house with chandeliers and marble flooring, and the nice school I once went to, I accepted my losses and have moved on as a stronger and more vibrant human being.