

Ground Zero – In the Cross-Hairs of Hurricane Irma: the One-Eyed CYCLOPS

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Beware the Beast

Greek Mythology tells us the story of Cyclops – the massive one-eyed barbaric beast with no conscience filled with unrelenting anger and hate.

We all knew Irma's wrath was relentless as she attacked the Caribbean Islands, leaving broken homes and countless dreams shattered in her wake.

As she charged like a raging bull with Florida in her cross-hairs, Irma had become the largest, most powerful storm ever recorded with 185 mph winds and was the size of Texas or France. The eye was 30 miles across. We tracked her hourly as she turned north and took dead aim on our little paradise of Naples in Florida.



A hurricane expert at MIT calculated Irma held about 7 trillion watts - twice the energy of all the bombs used in World War II, including the atom bombs dropped on Japan. The equivalent of 60,000 tons of high explosives was to pummel our community ruthlessly. The biggest difference between a bomb and this storm is the bomb expends its energy and is depleted -- this storm regenerates!

This was supposed to be the week I launched the marketing campaign for the [Leadership Institute](#) and begin writing on the [Collaborative Excellence Series of books](#). All must be postponed as Irma is life-threatening and that's career threatening.

Part One: Preparing for the Beast

I've survived nearly a dozen hurricanes, typhoons, and nor'easters on land and sea since my first experience with Hurricane Carol in 1954 when I was just seven. Having survived so many of these monsters, I've learned there is a routine of three phases: Preparation, the Storm, and Recovery. This routine is now almost rhythmic for me now.

Preparing for a storm is not just a physical act – there is much *mental* preparation as well. After devastating storms, psychologists report a great uptick in reports of post-traumatic stress disorder.

I can certainly appreciate the traumatic experience, my mom and dad, both survivors of New England's monster hurricane of 1938, demonstrated how to be a calming force in a storm, and plan for the recovery before the storm hits. I've adopted the thinking of my parents: I try to think about others – friends and neighbors – and their needs as well as your own. Also, I regard a storm as another challenge, another test, another opportunity to refine my sense of the whole world and how to minimize both the physical and psychic destruction.

T-5 (5 days before the storm Tuesday): all forecasts call for Florida to take a big wallop. My strategy: Never under-prepare. Every storm must be seen as a deadly monster bent on annihilation; Irma is as deadly as a plague and as powerful as an atom bomb.

Most people don't realize the power of such a storm is far more than the wind – it's the *rain being blasted by the wind*, like a high pressure fire hose blasting at trees, windows, roofs, and vehicles. Living directly on the bay, I know the *storm surge is unstoppable*. Every precaution must be taken.

For me, I live in a condominium complex of 27 units. Virtually everyone is gone at this time of year. There are 4 boats at the docks, including mine. Everything that could break loose *will*, especially in a storm like this. Every little thing that could be ripped apart *will* become a flying missile of destruction. Everything *must* be secured or put away.

The arduous task must begin: hauling or securing boats; finding evacuation accommodations; ensuring adequate water supply for a week of no power (we were without power for 10 days); having enough food and water to survive for at least a week after the storm (all perishables are lost in the aftermath and the grocery stores will be out of commission); draining the swimming pool (12 inches of hurricane water will overflow the pool and flood all our first floor units).

Our part-time maintenance man, Jack, is returning from Poland later this week – he will be a help, if he can make it back.

For the next 5 days, every daylight minute will be devoted to the fine details of preparation.

T-4 (Wednesday): The next four days are committed totally to securing boats, removing loose gear, storing lawn furniture, removing flower pots, and a myriad of little things: such as taking down paintings in my home, piling furniture into places that would not be ruined if glass windows smashed in, cleaning out my neighbor's refrigerator, and filling my car's gas-tank to get around without any open gas stations (they can't pump gas without electricity). By today the gas lines are three blocks long as every evacuee is filling their tanks and those prepared to stay are filling Jerry cans for their emergency generators.

Having been through so many storms, I know it's often the little stuff – what you overlooked or didn't think about -- that so frequently causes suffering or damage in the end.

At this point, the majority of storm-tracking projections are pointing for the eye to strike off the Atlantic coast, 100 miles away, closer to Miami. However, one -- just one plot -- tracked at Naples. Everyone said we'd be spared; I cited the old adage: plan for the worst and hope for the best. The worst did happen; some were ready, others weren't. Never bet on the odds of storm tracks; always expect a direct strike.

T-3 (Thursday): We have 4 boats at our docks – two large sailboats (mine and Robert Duane's – Robert had a stroke in December so his boat became my responsibility) and two motor boats. As acting dock-master, I asked the motor boat owners to haul their boats. The sailboats needed all sails stripped, awnings removed, storm lines set and doubled, storm anchors set, fenders doubled, chaffing gear put in place, loose gear below decks removed, halyards wrapped, and hatch covers secured. This took nearly two days per boat, but it was worth it. In the end the fenders, bumpers, and chaffing gear was beaten up, but no damage to the boats.

T-2 (Friday) Still working on the boats and removing all water hoses from the docks and taking all spare lines off the pilings. Finished securing everything on the grounds, including lawn and deck furniture, barbecue grilles, and outdoor tables. Drained 20 inches out of the pool so it wouldn't overflow, flooding the first floor units. The pool's drainage plumbing was broken; had to "jury rig a fix."

Needed gas for the car to make an evacuation, but all gas stations had run out of gas three days before as people filled their tanks to head north out of Florida for safety. It's a 6 hour drive from here just to cross the Georgia border, and every northbound highway was clogged with traffic. Many people drained the gas stations filling extra Jerry Cans of gas so they wouldn't run out of gas on the trip. Others filled

Jerry Cans for their emergency generators. If a station had gas, the line was several hours long. Figured I had just enough gas to evacuate eight miles inland and get back. Bought some canned food for use after the storm.

Stepped on the scales before falling asleep – had lost 4 pounds already from all the work – it was excess baggage weight I was happy to shed. I was tired but had to soldier through.

T-1 (Saturday): Still working on securing boats, setting extra lines, chaffing gear, then tending to my home. Moved all my furniture away from windows that might smash, put museum paintings in the kitchen where they would be safer, safeguarded precious papers and family heirlooms, did laundry to have fresh clothes after the storm, filled 6 one-gallon jugs of fresh water to survive for a week after the storm. Filled the ice chest with food for several days after the storm.

Then at 6 pm the first outer band of the storm hit – blasting gale winds with torrential rains. It's time to evacuate and head inland – high ground. The forecasters were predicting potentially devastating tidal surges that would deal a crushing blow to the waterfront. This was too dangerous to ride out, which would have been my preference.

Leaving my home, I had many apprehensions about what things would be like when I returned – maybe everything would be lost. I made the sign of the cross under the crucifix that's mounted above my front door. Then I asked the Lord to send a pile of miracles to our community and all Floridians – we would need them.

My neighbor, Robert Duane, has a home 8 miles inland which would be refuge for the next 3 nights and days. Normally it takes 20 minutes to get there; this time it took almost an hour – the wind and rain was foreboding and fierce.

After I arrived at the Duane residence, we watched the news – telling us we could expect the eye of the storm just after noon, tomorrow. Be prepared for 140 mph winds and up to 12-15 of storm surge. Rosealba, Robert Duane's wife, was very worried. I tried to calm her by explaining what would probably happen. This was no over-hyped forecast of a "weather event;" this was the real blockbuster – the Cycloptic Monster that would show no mercy on anyone or anything in its path. Rosealba was ready to spend the day of the hurricane in a closet, which was advocated as the safest place to be. I explained the closet was only necessary if the roof started to disintegrate.

One of the reasons for evacuating to higher ground was to save my 1993 Buick wagon, which could be destroyed in a storm surge. The car is now a classic, I wanted to protect it (they don't make 'em like that anymore).



Rosealba, Robert's wife, cooked a wonderful meal. I didn't realize how long it would be before my next full meal.

My host offered me the master bedroom which had a water bed. I'd forgotten how comfortable a water bed could be until it gently rocked all my aching muscles. I had taken for granted the cold drinks and air conditioning that had served to refresh me during the storm preparations – missed during Recovery.

I would soon realize how those simple pleasures would be so cherished in the next week and a half. Robert Duane cranked down the air conditioning to its lowest setting before we lost power, so the home was relatively cool with low humidity for the next two days.

Part Two: The Storm

T-0 (Sunday, Sept 10th): I awoke to the sound of rising winds and a premonition that I had parked my car in the wrong place. Before anyone else had arisen, I walked down the 500 yard driveway, crossed the street, and walked another 200 yards to a grassy knoll where my cherished 1993 Buick Roadmaster Estate Wagon was parked. Surveying the landscape I realized it could easily be in the clutches of a large live oak tree that would smash the car amidst if the wind knocked the tree down. Fortuitously I moved the car, to a less precarious position. It was a very wise decision I would learn later.

By mid-morning the wind started gusting a gale. We chose different corners on the lee-side of the house to gather to avoid being in direct line of a window blowing in or a tree crashing through the roof. No one had ever ridden out a storm of this magnitude in this house; we hoped it would hold up under pressure.

After a hearty breakfast the lights began to flicker on and off for fifteen minutes, and then snapped off for what we would find were days on end. We all said a prayer that the storm would not take lives and the house would be safe. We extended that prayer to all Floridians in the vicious reach of Cyclopic Irma.

By noon the winds were at hurricane force and climbing. First leaves and then branches flew across the yard driven by the raging wind and water. Then a deluge of heavy rain muscled into the fray. What's so often least understood – it's the power of the wind-driven rain that's so destructive. Think of a high pressure fire-hose slamming on you. That's **BLASTING POWER**.

For the next two hours we watched a horizontal wall of water careening like a bomb across the yard, taking large trees and snapping them like toothpicks. How strange that these trees had doggedly put all their energies into growing tall and strong, only to be broken by another force of nature in mere minutes. Snap and crack! We'd hear tall pines and palmettos groaning then yielding to the Cyclops. Some didn't snap, they were simply uprooted, just like you'd pull a stubborn weed out of your garden, landing with a saddening thud. Giants toppled, lying as dead soldiers lined row upon row on a battlefield, mowed down by brutal machine-guns. Looking at them, I felt a sobering pity and compassion to those once proud, dying trees. Had I not had the shelter of the Duane homestead, but instead was exposed raw to the wild wind, I could have suffered the same fate.

Then the inner eye-wall slammed into us. We had been receiving sustained blasts of 120 mph. The gusts in the eye-wall packed a 140-145 mph wallop. We felt the roar, the raw power, and the unrelenting, merciless evil in this monster. More trees were toppled or simply snapped. Later, we heard reports from Moorings Harbour (where I live) that the easterly winds had literally blown the water out of the bay – our boats were hard aground, the harbour was just a mud-puddle; down three feet below normal low tide. This is a mixed blessing – because when the back of the eye-wall hits in another hour, we expect the storm surge from the galloping westerly winds will blast the seashore, causing the bay to flood with a roaring tidal wave, perhaps as high as 12-15 feet above mean high tide – a disaster in the making.

Then, suddenly like an awesome counter-force intervening, we entered the Eye of the Cyclops. Calm, no winds (no sun either, which was an omen) for half an hour or so. (W learned later we were dead center in the eye.

It was now about 4 pm. I went out to survey damage during the passing of the eye, with the knowledge I'd need to be back under cover when the back of the eye struck. Destruction was extensive and everywhere. In half an hour we were slammed by the back-wall.

We had prayed for a miracle, and we actually were about to get two: first, the back of the eye-wall hit with an intensity of "only" 90-100 mph winds; and second, the natural tide was actually running out (ebbing, instead of coming in) . These two favorable factors combined to lessen the storm surge to only 5-6 feet, saving the beaches, houses, and helping any boats that were properly secured. While many

trees were yet to be knocked down as the back end of the eye punched northerly then westerly hurricane force winds at us, there was far less force on the back wall compared to the front.

By the time the hurricane had passed, it was the evening hour – darkness was upon us literally and symbolically. We had a makeshift dinner in utilitarian candle-light, talked about our good fortune to be alive in a sturdy house, and decided to survey the damage in detail in the morning. We all slept well with the tension of life-threatening destruction coming to an end.

Part Three: Recovery

T+1 (Monday, Sept 11) – With the morning light we can now see what really happened. While pictures are helpful, there is no way pictures can show the magnitude of the destruction. But I'll make an attempt:

Figure 1: Front of Robert Duane's house where I stayed to weather the storm. That's a 12 inch diameter tree that just missed the house. Rosealba cut it down by hand with a 12 inch pruning saw.



Figure 2: This is the driveway out to the street. It was idyllic two days ago. Now it looks like a scene out the 1954 movie *African Queen* with Humphrey Bogart and Kathryn Hepburn. The water is over a foot deep in many places.

Figure 3: After slogging through debris, several hundred yards of imploded jungle awaited us in the driveway.



The Heat Index had climbed to about 100° -- by mid-morning. After a couple of hours of hauling and chopping, we were exhausted. We went inside for a mid-morning breakfast and to get out of the sun.

Sitting down for some well deserved food and rest, I began drinking a large orange juice when I felt something wriggling on my left shoulder under my shirt. I touched it and it squirmed; I grabbed it through my shirt, twisting my neck to see a reptile's head. Yicks! I hate reptiles! Dashing out into the yard, I ripped off my shirt and out jumped a 10 inch iguana. Fortunately he didn't bite.

Guess this little iguana was petrified from the storm, jumped on me for safe harbor, and found refuge under my shirt.



Ironically, today is September 11th, marking the day of the horrible attack on New York City. I was in New York City that day and witnessed the mass destruction of the Twin Towers and the death of 3,000 innocent people. For a moment my mind cycled between that horrible day when so many people died, and today's destruction. Then my mind raced from the past back to the present, and focused on the task at hand without trying to wax philosophic.

After breakfast we slogged out to the end of the driveway. We then had a chance to view the knoll across the street where we parked the cars, hoping to see our vehicles resting peacefully in the gentle morning sun after torrential rain and raging winds. Oooww! This is what we saw:

Across the far side of an acre of newly emergent swamp (just an open field yesterday) is the grassy knoll. Look carefully in the center-left for a splotch of red -- that's Robert Duane's SUV buried under a fallen tree. Had I not moved my car, the tree's trunk would have scored a direct hit.



The Duane family's two cars were buried under the tree that would have cut my car in half, had I not moved it. My car is on the other side of the fallen tree (not observable in this picture)



Surprisingly, neither his red SUV, nor his wife's white Chevy (see next pictures) car suffered any real damage. But it took several hours of hard labour to chop a clear path out of the branches. We removed the Chevy first, not realizing it was parked on a fire-ant nest. Soon my feet were stinging, covered with red welts from those little monsters; Oowww! They sure pack a bite. No time to complain – there's work to be done. A travel ban was in place for all non-essential vehicles on the day after the storm, and many of the roads were impassable, covered by water or trees, so any effort to trek home would be fruitless.



That night I slept restlessly – the heat and humidity at night gave no respite. Little did I know we were just beginning a 10 day journey in relentless heat and sweltering humidity from evaporating rain water.

T+2 (Tuesday) We chopped and hacked our way for several hours through the trees. After clearing drainage ditches, we waited for the water to subside. We then drove our cars out from the grassy knoll through a flooded culvert, which had to be cleaned of trees and debris to be sure it had a solid bottom.

By 3:00 pm Tuesday afternoon, I finally packed up my gear and headed back home to Harbour Lights.

This was a unique experience – there are about 20 traffic lights along the 8 mile drive, all inoperative. We had heard on the radio: *when approaching a traffic light, treat it like a 4-way stop sign*. Great advice – now apply it to an intersection of 6 lanes plus left turn lanes. That’s a total of 16 different non-conforming judgments by drivers, all of whom are not in communications with each other. If this was Boston, I’d surmise accidents, loud cussing, and fist-fights. But Naples is actually quite civilized. At each intersection, people yielded to the right, were patient and cautious. Everyone got through without any hassle – a good sign that people’s stress was being handled reasonably. Apparently not everyone was as polite as those I encountered – the stress got to some who engaged in some tongue lashings.

The City of Naples road clearance crews had done an astounding job during the prior day. Every road was clear. This was an incredible feat. All highway crews turned up their *mojo*, and deserve a “high-five.”

Damage to the Neighborhood

Entering into my neighborhood, a somber sadness came over me seeing the losses of precious trees. It was shocking. Here are a few pictures of my community – every street looked like this:





When I returned to my home, the grounds were trashed with hundreds of torn palm fronds, seven downed trees were snapped or uprooted and a dozen of ornamental trees were lying on their sides. Several roof tiles had blown off. Minor flooding to first floor units – draining the pool had worked to minimize flooding. But no broken windows. No trees hit the buildings – all seven trees that crashed miraculously missed our homes. The flood surge was only 5 feet, just a foot below what would have flooded the first floor units. At the boat docks, the days of preparation worked – only very minor damage to the boats and docks. (several docks away from us, precautions were not made, resulting in major destruction to the luxury yacht and its dock).

Amazingly, our “Chickee Hut,” built by Seminole Indians, withstood the 140 mph winds like an ancient stone monolith. The palmetto fronds that were so delicately woven into a thatch roof, only suffered

“ruffled feathers.” This is a great tribute to their skills and design. We use the hut for outdoor entertainment.

Our beloved "Chickee Hut," built by Seminole Indians of local wood, survived with only ruffled feathers (fronds).



Jack, our part-time maintenance man, and I worked together until dusk to start clearing the grounds. Jack really *does care* about his work – he treats everyone’s unit (mostly all vacant during the summer) with a sense of love and affection, as he knows real people are living in the units later in the year.

That night, I walked down to the beach, and watched the stars – so far away but so clear. I could see billions of stars that were normally not visible because of light glare. We had running water, but there is a ban on drinking it – it must be boiled (on a barbeque stove) or use bottled water. Tonight, and for week of sweltering days and restless nights to come, electricity would be out. That night it was hot inside. With all windows open to ventilate the house, it was 88° F with high humidity as the sun set -- not exactly good sleeping weather. I went to bed perspiring, after taking a sleeping pill to try to sleep.

T+3 (Wednesday) I awoke perspiring at sunrise (clock- time doesn’t matter – without electricity we live by sun-time); it was 83° F inside. For the next week, virtually every day was the same routine:

Arise in a sweat. 83° F inside. Go down to the barbeque grille, put some bottled water in a pot, add coffee and cocoa – caffeine to get my motor started. Then get to work hauling debris, cutting small branches, putting trees back in place, patching broken fencing. We had no chain saws, so I employed my knowledge of how the Egyptians and Greeks moved heavy stone – levers and a block-and-tackle system made from rope and blocks from our boats – to haul heavy fallen palms. Jack, who is from Poland, was amazed how one person could move over 1,000 pounds of heavy logs. This is how we cleared

thousands of pounds of broken palmetto trees off the walkways. Jack is a great teammate – he and I get a lot done together, solving problems with no stress. That’s invigorating.

Working in the heat became unbearable between 11am and 3pm when the sun was high and the outside temperature spiked past +90° F, while the Heat Index (temp + humidity) ploughed over 100° F. To put the heat in perspective, if you’ve ever seen the movie *Papillon* (Steve McQueen & Dustin Hoffman in a prison colony in a jungle in French Guyana), these were our conditions for 10 days (thankfully without the guards).

After 11am, I can work only ½ an hour before feeling the dizzying swirl of heat exhaustion. Just climbing the one story stairs to my home is a struggle; finding the energy (normally I bound up the stairs) takes will-power. To recover, I’ll drink a quart of water – not cold water for there is no refrigeration – warm water. Then sit on the couch, in a quasi-delirious stupor, essentially devoid of all energy and without an ounce of mental alertness. It’s +88° F inside. After 45 minutes, I have recovered sufficiently to work up the mental energy to go back out and do more yard work. This is something I’ve mentally conditioned myself to do – clean up after hurricanes. But I never had this severity, and never this level of heat. I now have the deepest respect for our Mexican yard maintenance crew that works in such abusive heat.

Every muscle in my body is just tired out, from neck to foot. Didn’t even know how so many muscles could be worn down. Cannot wear shoes any more -- my feet are rubbed raw from chafing. I’m bitten, gouged, sliced, and bruised – my hands are blistered and cut, but nothing so badly as to be debilitating. Changing underwear three times a day to ward off infections. Will power is the only thing that charges me to move forward. Making sure I’m taking my blood pressure pills religiously so I don’t have a stroke.

It’s actually quite noisy all the time. With the windows open, the penetrating cacophony of emergency generators and the counter-point of buzzing chain-saws is not soothing to the weary soul.

At night, before heading to bed, I take a dip in the pool to cool down. It helps, but the house is still 88° F inside. Fifteen minutes later I’m perspiring again. Taking 2 sleeping pills and still having a rough time falling asleep. Wake up every morning in a sweat – again it’s 83° F inside at dawn, despite all the windows open. But I’m safe; and this too will pass. I could really use a cold drink – but no one has ice. The lines at the few gas stations that are open are blocks long. Rosealba Duane said she was in a gas line for 7 hours after the storm.

On Sunday morning I went to church, which was, to my delight, air-conditioned by an emergency power generator. What a respite. We all thanked the Lord, as the damage could have been worse. The local grocery market is open, but bring your own flashlight, they have limited power and depleted inventory.

Jack has proven to be a great co-worker in the clean-up – we work well together as a team, coordinating our individual efforts and working together moving some of the heaviest trees.

Here’s a picture of Jack after we trimmed the fronds off a heavy palmetto and moved it off the walkway with the block & tackle.



It took 10 days to restore the power, which finally happened at dusk. We all cheered, turned on air-conditioning, began cleaning out stinking refrigerators (all perishable food was a total loss), and started making ice from bottled water (the contaminated water ban was still in effect).

T+11 (Wednesday, September 20) – this is a day devoted to self-recovery. The laundry is moldering, and needs to be washed; sheets and towels too. Everyone’s refrigerator needs to be cleaned and bleached. I *must* do some grocery shopping – there is virtually no food left except for oatmeal. The rugs need vacuuming – there are leaves everywhere that were tracked in from outside. Work continued helping neighbors and our condo community over the intervening days, while trying to catch up on a backlog of work and emails.

T+15 (Sunday, September 24) After returning from church, Jerry Watkins, my neighbor across the street (he’s a fellow sailor) had called and asked if I could help remove debris from our neighbor Harry’s dock and boat (four houses away from me on Moorings Bay). Harry has a beautiful sailboat, which took a beating during the storm. A large palm tree had crashed into the water alongside the boat, snapping the forward mooring line, leading to an avalanche of greater damage. The boat pitched, rolled, and yawed, smashing pilings and docks on both sides of the boat.

I’ve known Jerry socially for years, but never had a chance to work with him side-by-side. In the work we did for Harry and other neighbors, Jerry and I had to figure out how to remove two large waterlogged palm trees from the water, and haul out a damaged dock’s deck that was floating in the water to prevent it from slamming into the boat, and several pieces of sunken dock. Together, all we had were our wits, experience, and a block & tackle I had rigged from gear off my sailboat. Jerry was the ideal teammate. In total, our mission required us to make scores of mutual decisions to solve problems: where to attach lines? where was the center of balance? how to use the boat’s winches to haul the logs? what must be done to be sure two

In the foreground you can see about 1/3 of a palm tree we had pulled out of the water. The crown of the tree, full of fronds and coconuts, is still under water. It weighs well over a ton. Missing portions of the dock are in the water needing to be pulled out.



We've tied a bridle around one of the portions of sunken dock deck. Jerry is cranking the winch on the mast, which is acting like a crane, while I'm hauling the deck out of the water. The dock stringer I did the balancing act upon is in the center of the pic.



seventy-year-old seniors didn’t blow their backs or otherwise get hurt? etc.

Never any arguing, just debating alternatives. Never did we criticize or get in a tug of war over whose idea was best. We both chimed in with an idea, refined the idea together, tested it on the job, made adjustments, and chipped away at the problems like a sculptor chips stone away to reveal a statute.

Jerry worked from the boat and seawall, while I worked from a kayak or in the water rigging lines to the logs. No time wasted; no extraneous blabber; just think, execute, haul away, crank winches, and attach preventer ropes to keep the logs and debris from backsliding. Two older guys acting in unison, buzzing with energy, muscles straining, sweating from every pore.

Each of the waterlogged logs weighed well over a ton. Using the techniques the Egyptians used to build the Pyramids and the Greeks to erect the Parthenon, we got the fallen logs and broken dock deck out of the water. We had each other's backs; once when I maneuvered the kayak under a partially removed log, Jerry warned me to get out from under the log, for if it slipped, it would crush me.

At one time I went out onto a broken dock, which gave way without warning. DANGER! Like a ballerina reacting in a split second (according to Jerry who observed the tip-toe dance), I realized if I fell I'd be impaled on rusty nails and ripped by mean-minded barnacles. I darted forward on the dock's deckless stringer with two fast steps, rapidly running out of runway. Quick! Pirouette: twist ninety degrees left and dart across to the middle stringer, lunge at the boat hoist on the other side, all without time to think. Made it! Whew! That was close. Jerry said I belonged in the ballet for that maneuver. Close call, but no harm done. Won't do that again.

I noticed Jerry was starting to falter from early signs of sun-stroke; time to call a break. His lovely wife Susan arrived just in time with cold water. There is something spiritual about people working together, trusting in each other's judgment (even though they had never engaged in a difficult task before), focusing on the mission, creating rapid-fire solutions, and seeing our results materialize quickly.

Neither Jerry nor I gave our time for Harry or any of our other neighbors with expectations of reward or an expression of gratitude. We did the work because it was the right thing to do for our community. We called ourselves "the Corinthians," which is a nautical term meaning *helping or rescuing fellow sailors (and neighbors) in time of need or danger, all for the greater good.*

Celebration

Sunday night (September 24th) We held a neighborhood cookout at our stalwart "Chickee" hut. Jack, our maintenance man, was invited with his girlfriend. He remarked how important and meaningful it was to be regarded as part of our family. During dinner, we all gave thanks to the Lord for sparing us the tidal surge, raising our glasses to those many workers (some came from as far away as Canada) that gave of themselves to help in the recovery of our community, and told stories about our individual experiences. We remarked how, in a crisis, the best qualities in humanity can shine. Hurricane *Maria* had devastated Puerto Rico a couple of days prior to our celebration. We realized, while we were battered and bruised, our island neighbors were served a knockout blow – much like the difference between a technical knockout (TKO) and a real knockout (KO) in a boxing match that goes the distance between heavyweight pugilists.

Aftermath

In the aftermath, I lost nearly 7 pounds (that's good, the excess baggage needed to go). I now have a full-body suntan from the work outdoors. I was careful to thank Robert and Rosealba Duane and their son Diego for sheltering me and feeding me with care during the clean-up. Jack's work cleaning up is laudatory. Jerry and I have a deeper bond of friendship.

All tolled, the Cyclops gobbled nearly three weeks of my life, between preparations and cleanup. There are over a thousand emails to be sorted through. Two valuable weeks of post-Labour Day business are lost. Two programs were cancelled. Will have to work relentlessly with real focus to make up for lost time. As Napoleon said: "I can regain lost territory, but never lost time."

The death toll in Florida from Hurricane Irma stands at over 43; most not from the storm itself, but from negligence or ignorance. Most deaths were during recovery, which was more deadly than the storm itself. 11 people succumbed to carbon monoxide poisoning caused from the noxious fumes of emergency generators. 9 died from blunt trauma or injury, including those involved in car accidents. As floodwaters continue to rise in some areas, there were seven deaths from drowning. There were five deaths associated with heart attacks. One person died from electrocution, and one death attributed to

heat exhaustion, although the death was also tied to "chronic alcoholism." 12 more elderly died in a rehabilitation center from heat. One man in Naples fell from a roof doing repairs.

It has been an arduous but exhilarating adventure – one I am reluctant to want to repeat -- peppered with many moments of inspiration interlaced with anxiety and exhaustion. Giving to others is the greatest joy that helps heal and replenish us in the Recovery.

T+21 – Sunday, Oct 1 Three weeks after the storm, I took several pictures of our neighborhood. Everywhere, every street is piled high with debris from the storm – several million cubic yards of dead branches, leaves – like funeral pyres marking the memory of *Irma's* deadly power.

[This view of Regatta Road is typical of just about all of Naples neighborhoods a four weeks after the storm](#)



[This is West Boulevard. A small lake behind the sign lost 70% of its trees.](#)





These segments of a felled Royal Palm reminded me of pieces of a marble pillar fallen from an ancient Greek temple.



This picture seemed best to symbolize the power of the American spirit to prevail, with the Flag shining through the skeleton of a downed tree.



In the summer of '17, across the Gulf of Mexico and throughout the Caribbean, many have been struck by the broadside cannon blasts of Hurricanes *Harvey*, *Irma*, and *Maria*. We all have similar stories of gallantry, courage, suffering and caring for others. We were pounded mercilessly, but Puerto Ricans have a miserable recovery – years, not weeks. My story is just one of the many stories; most of which will be lost to posterity in a modern era where digital communications is replacing the written word.

Epilogue

More than three weeks after the storm, the stress on many people has been amplified by the compounding difficulties (call it “complexification”) trying to get our lives back in order. Here’s a good example from a friend, Kathia Miller, which typifies many of our lives:

We're still living the misery. Workmen come and go here and there. Dry wall work, continued mold. New roof done but ceiling replacement marked for one month from today. Need new floor covering, awnings, and pool cage. Fence repair. A hundred decisions. These days we have so many workmen on call that we never know till the last minute when we can leave the house. Right now, for instance, we await a flooring man who's 25 minutes late coming to measure the music room for floor covering. But that can't begin till the ceiling is redone in early (cross fingers) November. Currently we're also trying to locate a drainage expert and an awning supplier. We hope the mold 'n' mildew guy will be back soon...

And we were nearly flooded again Friday night with that rainstorm. Where I used to enjoy the sound of rain on the roof, now I cringe.

Hate to perspire at all now from the memory of 11 days without power. I finally got my small rugs placed back on a couple of floors last night--no more carpets for us, or even bigger rugs under furniture that have to be removed sopping wet with box cutters.

Oops, my husband just called to me saying I left our bank statement in the refrigerator overnight. (Sounds like a good book title). Ha! Obviously my mind was on several things at once.

I know I'm not losing my mind--just trying to clear extra space to cram in ever-increasing loads of thoughts.

Kathia is not whining. For thousands of us, our habits and patterns that simplify our lives are just totally disrupted. For so many of us, “complexification” has become the norm. No solution is easy, because so many problems are interconnected inside a discombobulated sequence of events. Workers and managers can’t plan their “normal” day because some unknown problem, such as a hidden sinkhole in the ground, is discovered while cutting down a tree, which elongates the timeline, disrupting the next assignment. Some have compared this to fighting a guerilla war. Or it’s like a symphony conductor trying to coordinate his orchestra, but someone mixed up all the sheet music – now everyone is playing the wrong notes out of order – but the conductor doesn’t yet realize the mistake!

Not all our Corinthian good will met with open arms. Jerry and I offered to help remove a fallen palm tree from the water at one of our neighboring condominium’s docks. We were met with a plethora of fearful resistance: “Oh, I have to get permission;” “We need to check with the president of the board;” “What about liability – we’ll have to check with our lawyers and insurance agent.” After getting approval ten days later, Jerry and I returned to remove the palm. Even before we could start the work, we were confronted by an irate woman who challenged us. When we explained we had received the go-ahead from the maintenance man who had checked with his boss, who had gotten approval from the president of the board of directors, the woman told us to stop. She did not believe we had permission; she then went inside to call the board president. Jerry and I waited on the seawall to receive further confirmation. After fifteen minutes of standing around (we would have had the job almost done at that point), we realized the woman must have sown fear, uncertainty, doubt, discord, and distrust (known as FUDDD), creating confusion and animosity. At that point Jerry and I decided we’d better leave.

On a much more beautiful note, in the mail was a letter from one of my neighbors. It brought a tear to my eye (you’ve probably guessed by now I’m a pretty passionate guy). They wrote:

*Thank you – May this card be a reminder of how much you’re appreciated for your kind spirit and caring ways. We are grateful for all the tender loving care you provided. We honestly can’t thank you enough. Peace, Love, Health signed:
Your Neighbors (names withheld)*

Included was a substantial amount of money, which I will donate to the [Leadership Institute](#) and use a portion to take Jack out to lunch.

Other neighbors have written very kind expressions of gratitude, for which I am very grateful.

I hope this narrative gives my friends an idea of why I was incommunicado for two weeks, and how the whole escapade has consumed nearly a month from preparation to recovery.

Thank you all.

Robert