

Hurricanes



By: Tracie Dickerson

“News flash IKE has now been upgraded to a category 3 Hurricane”

The words scroll across my TV set. I sit on the edge of my couch terrified.

The storm has started to make an upward turn. My heart sinks as I picture my family, friends and home in Galveston. I wonder if this 730 mile wide monster is the "big one." We're overdue. I hold my breath as childhood memories wash over me.

I was five years old covered with super itchy mosquito bites. My mom said to me, "Alicia is coming."

I innocently asked, "Who is Alicia?"

Mom explained, "Alicia is not a who. She's a hurricane."

"Mom, is she a bad one?"

My mother cautiously replied, "We'll see honey. Don't worry about this storm. We're tough Texans. We can take it."

I didn't understand the panic in her tone, and I didn't know why we put big X's on our windows with masking tape.

By the next day those mosquito bites turned into chicken pox. I would like to think my mom would have wanted to break family tradition and leave the island for the Category 3 storm.

But the evacuation orders came too late. By the time the mayor ordered, "**Leave the island immediately. Go to the shelters!**" the bridge was impassable and the ferries had closed.

There was no choice but to stay as the storm pushed ashore. We were supposed to go to our shelter; but it was impossible to leave. Nervous shelter workers driving a shuttle came to pick us up. They risked their lives to save Mom

and me from this monster. When they arrived, Mom honestly told them, “My daughter has chicken pox.”

They politely responded, “Ma’am, I’m sorry to tell you but kids with chicken pox are not allowed in shelters.”

Mom answered, “I understand. Thanks for your courage and effort. God bless you.” Then I heard the wind slam the screen door as workers ventured back into the storm.

I remember the way the sky looked. The fear that a pre-hurricane sky put into me was indescribable. I knew something bad was about to happen. The entire sky turned dark and foreboding. I realized that shelter shuttle had been our last hope.

The winds had become too strong to drive. We couldn't get to my grandparents' house, so we hid in our hall closet that my mom made into a camping oasis. Somehow she crunched in a mattress, herself, itchy me, an eighty-pound dog, some food and water in a closet that was only about four feet across and not very deep.

As we sat in the closet I heard the wind whip through our house and I thought about another family hurricane story when my mom was a little kid. My grandmother heard the winds start, and she went into take care of my mother and my aunts. My grandmother was frightened, and because of her fear, her children also became scared. My grandfather slept soundly the entire night. When he awoke the next morning, he queried, “Why is everyone so tired and cranky?”

I thought to myself storms lead to panic so try stay calm for Mom's sake.

Then the power went out. In total darkness, with my dog crushing me I whispered, “Mom, are you okay?”

She replied, “Yes baby, I'm okay .This will be over soon. Don't worry.”

Sometimes my mom would open the door to go check on things. I admired her courage and asked, “What is going on out there?”

She said, “Tracie, it's almost over; just a little more time. We're doing fine. This old house is a survivor.”

Eventually, the storm subsided. Or so I thought. It was fun to finally get to go outside. The weather was beautiful. I did not understand that there was not a lot of time before the other side of the eye would come, but I remember how quiet everything was. My neighbors talked about the calm before the storm. Maybe it was the calm during the eye. I was too young to understand, but I watched as all of the neighbors gathered and did things in a panic. Hammers, ladders, boards – it was a world wind. Before I knew it, (and with a lot of whining) we were back in the closet. For awhile the phone worked, and I recall listening to the radio

announcing the dangers of the storm while I scratched my itchy pox. At some point, the radio died, and that is when I heard the wind whipping around the house. Once in awhile my mom and I would take a look out of the window where one of the boards had a knot that left a peep hole. I saw lightening, tornadoes, and a green sky.

My mom was always looking at the backyard. Later that day, during the storm, we heard a deafening, ripping and cracking noise. We prayed together. And as we prayed I remembered a story my grandfather told me about my great-grandmother and her family's survival through the 1900 storm.

My grandfather described that the 1900 storm killed over 6000 people, and it came with no warning. The weatherman for the island knew there was a problem, but his hands were tied by Washington. All weather reports were required to go through them. Also, Cuba tried to warn us the hurricane was coming, but just a few days before, the federal government stopped weather communications with Cuba.

The days leading up to the storm were perfect. There were few clouds in the sky. Everyone enjoyed playing at the beach. On the day of the storm, the weather started out beautiful, but quickly began to turn.

Before they knew it, the water began to rise as the sky became dark. My family went into their homes, and the water began to come in under their doors. Eventually the water pressure was too much for the windows, and the panes began to explode. Water flowed into the house. The family had retreated into the attic to escape the ever rising waters. Water then began to flood the attic. My great-great grandfather took an axe and started chopping a hole in the roof so they could escape from drowning. After telling me this story, my grandparents would point to doors in the roofs of houses. Even today, my attic has two small windows, and there is an axe at the top of the stairs.

Eventually Alicia passed, and we ventured out. I recollect only one thing. The hundred year-old oak tree had toppled over. It knocked down four fences. My mom told me the loud noise we heard was the tree falling, and the loud branches snapping as it toppled over. I will never know why it fell in the exact opposite direction of the wind; but had it followed the wind, this forty-foot tree would have fallen onto our house, and my mother, my dog and I would have met an untimely demise.

As I see TV pictures of Ike's destruction of Galveston's seawall which is covered in debris, I wonder about my family, friends and home. When I hear stories of the search and rescue missions and the recovery of the dead, I think about my aunt's cousin, who panicked leaving the safety of his home to later drown in his car.

Today, I reflect about the life lessons that my family has taught me:

Don't panic during a storm

Show courage to your loved ones so they won't panic.

And never forget to be prepared.

Healthy Stories is available on Amazon at http://www.amazon.com/Healthy-Stories-Sharing-Health-Department/dp/0615206344/ref=sr_1_7?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1224865070&sr=8-7

Healthy Stories is looking for a few good recipes.

Have you created that delectable delight?

Is it filled with healthy ingredients?

If so, email us your healthy recipe for publication in our next edition.