

TIM LOCKRIDGE: HUGO REMEMBERED

THE DAY OF HURRICANE HUGO GEORGE AND I, THE MEDICS, WERE CALLED TO CHECK SOMEONES BLOOD PRESSURE AT LINCOLN H.S. THE DESIGNATED HURRICANE SHELTER. ON ARRIVAL WE FOUND AN ELDERLY COUPLE AT THE TRIAGE STATION AND THE GENTLEMAN TOLD ME HE HAD FAILED TO BRING HIS BLOOD PRESSURE MEDICINE. CHECKING HIS VITAL SIGNS THEY WERE FOUND TO BE WITHIN NORMAL PARAMETERS. HE TOLD US HE HAD MET HIS WIFE IN A HURRICANE SHELTER DURING HURRICANE CAMILLE. AFTER SEEING THAT THEY WERE SECURE WE WENT BACK TO MEDIC 6 STATION (MCCLELLANVILLE) FOR SUPPLIES, RETURNING TO LINCOLN H.S. TO PROVIDE MEDICAL CARE FOR THE SHELTER POPULATION. BY THEN THE WIND AND RAIN HAD PICKED UP SUBSTANTIALLY. WE WERE DISCUSSING WHETHER TO PUT THE AMBULANCE "OUT OF SERVICE" TIL THE HURRICANE PASSED WHEN WE GOT A CALL FOR ASSISTANCE. WE HONORED THAT CALL AND FOUND A WHEELCHAIR BOUND MAN AT THE ORIGIN OF THE CALL. WE WERE IMPRESSED AT HOW NEAT & CLEAN EVERYTHING WAS IN THE RESIDENCE. IT WAS LIKE A SHOWROOM, WALL TO WALL CARPET WITH PASTIC RUNNERS IN PLACE TO KEEP IT CLEAN. EVEN THE LAMP SHADES HAD CLEAR PLASTIC COVERS, IMPECCABLY CLEAN. WE LOADED UP THE MAN AND WHEELCHAIR INTO ^{THE} AMBULANCE TRANSPORTING THEM TO LINCOLN HIGH. JUST AFTER ARRIVING BACK HIGH WINDS KNOCKED OUT THE COMMUNICATIONS TOWER, ELIMINATING THE ABILITY TO RECIEVE ANY EMERGENCY CALLS, OR LET THE OPERATIONS CENTER KNOW OUR STATUS. WE WERE EFFECTIVELY "OUT OF SERVICE" EXCEPT TO THE SHELTER POPULATION. THE MEDIC QUARTERS WERE AT THE END OF A HALLWAY ACCESSABLE TO PROSPECTIVE PATIENTS. THIS IS WHERE WE "HUNKERED DOWN" FOR HUGO, IN A BIOLOGY LAB. AT THE END OF A HALLWAY.

THE OTHER ROOMS WERE LOCKED DOWN TO REDUCE CHANCES OF VANDALISM AND THEFT. THE GENERAL POPULATION WAS LOCATED IN THE CAFETERIA AND THE GYMNASIUM.

MOST PEOPLE WERE IN ALMOST A PARTY MODE. THE CONTINUAL BUZZING ROAR OF EXCITED CONVERSATION AND SCREAMS FROM THE CHILDREN LASTED INTO THE NIGHT, UNTIL THE HOUSE LIGHTS SUDDENLY WENT OUT FOLLOWED BY SURPRISED SHOUTS OF THE OCCUPANTS. THE ATMOSPHERE QUIETENED AS EVERYONE SETTLED DOWN TO SLEEP LISTENING TO THE CONTINUAL ROAR OF THE WIND AND THE SLOWLY DIMMING EMERGENCY LIGHTS WHICH HAD COME ON EARLIER.

GEORGE WENT TO SLEEP. I READ A BOOK, UNTIL THE EMERGENCY LIGHTS BLED OUT, READING BY FLASH LIGHT TIL DECIDING TO TURN IN FOR THE NIGHT ON A SLEEPING BAG ATOP THOSE HARD BLACK DISSECTION TABLES. IT SEEMED I HAD JUST FALLEN ASLEEP WHEN I WOKE TO THE SOUND OF TRICKLING WATER WHICH WAS COMING THROUGH THE WINDOW A.S. WHICH PROMPTLY FELL INTO THE FLOOR WITH A BANG. WATER BEGAN POURING INTO THE ROOM. WE RAN INTO THE ADJOINING HALL WHERE REDDISH COLORED SEA WATER SWIRLED AROUND OUR ANKLES. I ASKED GEORGE WHY HE WAS LAUGHING. HE SAID "LOOKS LIKE WE'RE GONNA GET OUR FEET WET." I SAID "GEORGE, THE WATERS COMING IN THROUGH THAT WINDOW FOUR FEET OFF THE GROUND." ABOUT THE SAME TIME WE NOTICED LIGHTS SHINING THROUGH THE WINDOW SLITS IN THE DOUBLE DOORS BESIDE US. WE REALIZE WE'RE LOOKING AT A CAR FLOATING HEAD HIGH, WITH ITS HEADLIGHTS "SHORTED ON," HEADED INTO THE DOORS. LOOKING DOWN THE FAR END OF THE HALL WAS JUST AS DISORIENTING. THERE WAS A "FAN OF WATER" SPEWING OUT OF EVERY DOOR JAMB ALONG THE BOTH SIDES DOWN THE HALL. I FELT LIKE I WAS IN A SUBMARINE THAT HAD TAKEN A DIRECT HIT WHILE THE WATER STEADILY ROSE AROUND ME. WE SAW THE DRUG BOX

THE WATER
DID TAKE OR
URECK "ALL"
IF OUR
SUPPLIES
EQUIP. ETC.

GO FLOATING OUT OF THE ROOM AND DOWN THE HALL. THAT GOT OUR ATTENTION. WE BEGAN LOADING ALL OUR MEDICAL GEAR ONTO THE STRETCHER HOPING TO SALVAGE IT, BUT THAT EFFORT PROVED FUTILE AS THE WATER CONTINUED TO RISE. THIS MUST BE THE WAY A SEWER RAT FEELS, I THOUGHT, WHEN TRAPPED IN THE PIPES. WE MADE OUR WAY DOWN THE HALL, WATER CRESTING THE TOP OF THE STRETCHER, THAT QUICK. I HELPED GEORGE LOAD THE GEAR INTO THE CAFETERIA WHERE A PARTY ATMOSPHERE NO LONGER PREVAILED. PEOPLE WERE THRASHING AROUND IN THE WATER, PANICKED, SCREAMING IN EARNEST DESPERATION. WITH THE ASSISTANCE OF A FEW OTHER MEN WE WERE ABLE TO QUELL THE SCREAMING WHICH EVERYONE REALIZED WASN'T HELPING A BIT. EVERYONE STOPPED SCREAMING, EXCEPT FOR ONE WOMAN, WHO WAS STANDING ON TOP OF AN INTERIOR WINDOW LEDGE POUNDING ON THE WINDOW. THE SEAWATER, BEING HELD OUTSIDE BY VANDALISM PROOF PLEXIGLASS, WAS WELL OVER HER HEAD AND SHE WAS ALREADY STANDING ON A FOUR FOOT HIGH LEDGE. SOME ONE PULLED HER OFF THE LEDGE PROBABLY CONCERNED SHE MIGHT DISLodge THE GLASS PANEL AND A WALL OF SEAWATER WOULD IMMEDIATELY FLOW IN. LOOKING OUT THROUGH THAT GLASS INTO THE OCEAN IS ONE OF THE STRANGEST SIGHTS IN MY LIFE. A GOLD FISH IN REVERSE, ME, IN MY LITTLE CONTAINER OF AIR, LOOKING OUT UNDER THE WATER. I STILL CAN SEE MY MORTALITY IN THAT FRAME. ALL THIS TIME THE WATER INSIDE THE SCHOOL KEPT RISING. YOU NEED NO IMAGINATION TO REALIZE IF THE WATER WAS AS DEEP INSIDE AS OUT, EVERYBODY WOULD DROWN. WE HAVE \approx ONE THOUSAND SOULS IN LINCOLN HIGH THIS NIGHT FOR A HURRICANE NAMED HUGO. THE CAFETERIA TABLES PROVIDE LITTLE REPRIEVE FROM THE FLOOD WATERS EVENTUALLY REACHING ^{OUR} CHEST ~~HERE~~ FROM ATOP THE TABLES. THE WHOLE TIME THIS WAS OCCURRING THE WIND SOUNDS LIKE A BOEING 747 BACKING ITS ENGINES DOWN OVER THE SCHOOL AT TREE TOP LEVEL AND THEN IT STOPPED....

THE EYE OF THE HURRICANE ENVELOPED US IN AN ERIE CALM, LIKE MOTHER NATURE HIT THE OFF SWITCH. IF THE TIDAL SURGE CONTINUED AT ITS PRESENT LEVEL HIGHER GROUND WAS A NECESSITY, SO I LEFT GEORGE IN THE CAFETERIA AND WENT SEARCHING FOR THE SCHOOL PRINCIPAL IN HOPES HE WOULD KNOW OF A ROOF ACCESS, DOOR OR PANEL, THAT EVERYONE COULD GET ABOVE THE SURGE LEVEL. UNFORTUNATELY THERE IS NONE. THAT IS THE REASON WHY THERE WERE STORIES OF PEOPLE STUFFING THEIR CHILDREN INTO THE CEILING SPACE, BECAUSE THAT WAS AS HIGH UP AS YOU COULD GET INSIDE THE BUILDING!

THE HURRICANE WAS ON THE WAY BACK IN AND WITH IT, SO WE THOUGHT, THE REST OF THE TIDAL SURGE. I CLIMBED OUT A WINDOW, GRABBED HOLD OF THE GUTTER AND PULLED MYSELF UP ONTO THE ROOF. I ASSISTED THE PRINCIPAL AND DEPUTY ONTO THE ROOF AS WELL. A CURSORY EXAM CONFIRMED THERE WAS NO ADEQUATE WAY TO ACCESS THE ROOF, THEN THE HURRICANE WAS BACK ON US IN ALL ITS FURY. I TIED MYSELF TO A LARGE METAL POWER SUPPLY LINE WITH MY BELT AND LAY LOW EXPECTING THE WATER TO RUSH OVER THE ROOF AT ANY MOMENT. I BECAME COLD AND DEPUTY DUTART GAVE HIS RAINCOAT TO ME THAT I MIGHT GET WARM.

WE LAY THERE FOR HOURS, THE STORM RAGING AND US PRAYING. WHILE ON THE ROOF WE FELT A SICKENING SENSE THAT WE MAY BE THE ONLY SURVIVORS. AS I LAY ON THAT WET GRAVEL ROOFTOP, IN MY MIND, I SAW THE EYE OF GOD LOOKING DOWN UPON ME FROM THE CENTER OF THE STORM AND I PRAYED HE WOULD KEEP MY WIFE AND FRIENDS SAFE.

IN THE DARK OF EARLY MORNING MOTHER NATURE PRESENTED US WITH YET ANOTHER PROBLEM. A TEN TON A.C. UNIT BECAME THE WINDBREAK FOR THE LATRINE, WHICH WAS NECESSARY FOR MANY REASONS, JUST ONE BEING IF YOU GOT TURNED THE WRONG WAY IN THAT WIND YOU MAY HAVE TO REPEAT THE PROCESS. I VOLUNTEERED MY SOCKS AS TOILET PAPER SO THINGS WENT RATHER SMOOTHLY.

DAYLIGHT BEGAN TO CREEP IN AND THE WINDS TO ABATE. WE VENTURED CLOSE ENOUGH TO THE ROOF'S EDGE TO PEER OVER AND CHARLIE THE DEPUTY CRIED OUT IN SHOCK WHEN HE SPOTTED A BODY IN THE WATER (WHICH TURNED OUT TO BE A TARP). THE NEXT THING WE NOTICED WAS THE BLOCK EDGING TO THE ROOF WAS MOSTLY GONE (3FT LONG 1" PIECES OF HEAVY TERRA COTTA). THANK GOD ONE OF THOSE DIDN'T HIT US! THEN, LOOKING OVER THE SIDE, WHERE I PARKED THE AMBULANCE, ^{I SAW} ~~SEEN~~ IT WAS STILL UNDERWATER EXCEPT FOR THE STAR OF LIFE ON TOP THE PATIENT COMPARTMENT BOX. (WE LATER FOUND A MULLET, ALONG WITH THE PUFF MUD AND SILT COVERING EVERYTHING IN THE PATIENT COMPARTMENT BOX). WE ALSO SAW CARS ON TOP OF CARS, A MOBILE HOME HAD WASHED UP BETWEEN THE BUILDINGS, THE FOUNDATIONS FOR A HOUSE LIKE CONSTRUCTION WAS BEGINNING BUT NO HOUSE. THE BRICK HOUSE WHICH HAD STOOD THERE WAS FOUND A HUNDRED YARDS AWAY, INTACT, IN THE MIDDLE OF THE ROAD, MINUS THE WICKED WITCH OF THE WEST STOCKING FEET & RUBY SLIPPERS. BROKEN TREES, BROKEN TREES, CARS IN BROKEN TREES ~~AS FAR AS~~ ^{AS FAR AS THE} AND MORE BROKEN TREES ~~AS FAR AS THE~~ ^{AS FAR AS THE} ~~SEE.~~ ^{SEE.}

6

THE EYE COULD SEE, A SHRIMP BOAT IN THE ROAD AND CARS IN THE WATER. WE ALSO SAW FLASH LIGHTS IN THE CAFETERIA WHICH MEANT THERE WERE SURVIVORS. WE EXITED THE ROOF, WITH THE HURRICANES ROTARY WHINE STILL IN OUR EARS AND FOREVER ETCHED UPON OUR BRAINS.

WADING THROUGH KNEE DEEP WATER WE MADE OUR WAY TO THE FRONT OF THE SCHOOL WHERE MY PARAMEDIC PARTNER GAVE ME A STARTLED HUG, HAVING GIVEN ME UP FOR DEAD, WHEN HE FOUND MY GUITAR FLOATING IN THE SEA WATER:

A MASS EXODUS BEGAN ABOUT THAT TIME, MOSTLY ON FOOT BECAUSE MOST TRANSPORTATION WAS EITHER UNDERWATER OR HAD BEEN. A COAST GUARD HELICOPTER WAS LANDING ON THE FOOTBALL FIELD AND FLEW OUT THE ELDERLY GENTLEMAN I HAD SEEN THE DAY BEFORE. HE HAD A MASSIVE STROKE IN THE NIGHT AND I HEARD HE LATER PASSED ON. IRONIC, THEY FOUND EACH OTHER IN A HURRICANE SHELTER AND THEN LOST EACH OTHER IN A HURRICANE SHELTER SO MANY YEARS APART. THE MAN IN THE WHEELCHAIR CAME HOME AND DIED OF GRIEF FROM WHAT HE FOUND THERE, SO I HEARD.

GEORGE TURNED OUT TO BE A HERO BY HOLDING A SMALL CHILD UP OUT OF THE WATER FOR AN ALREADY OVER-BURDENED MOTHER. SOME TIMES IT IS THE SIMPLE THINGS THAT COUNT.

SINCERELY
TIMOTHY LOCKRIDGE