

MOTHER NATURE'S FULL FURY

By John F. Hall

As a boy growing up in Miami, Florida, I was no stranger to hurricanes. I remember seeing large ships that had been tossed over a mile inland. I looked at a bridge on the Overseas Highway going to Key West. It was ripped apart like it was made of soft pine wood. Back in 1935, the road was built on the Overseas Railway right of way. On September 2, 1935 a Category 5 hurricane, with sustained winds of 300 miles an hour, hit the ongoing construction of the bridge connecting Lower Matecumbe Key and Long Key. The hurricane destroyed much of the Overseas Railroad in the upper keys. Of the over 400 fatalities from the hurricane, more than half were World War I veterans and their families. The Florida East Coast (FEC) Railway was financially unable to rebuild the damaged sections of the Overseas Railway. So it sold its entire right of way and remaining infrastructure, from Miami to Key West, about 106 miles, to the State of Florida's DOT.



To be closer to his job at the John F. Kennedy Space Center, my dad, Charles J. Hall purchased a small house in the town of Edgewater, just south of Daytona Beach. It has a nice fenced-in front and back yard. The only downside is its location. It is a block away from the railroad tracks. CSX Railroad purchased the FEC Railroad and it makes 12 runs a day, and only one in the day time. I could never get use to hearing the train horn. It is loud, between 96 to 110 decibels. The rule mandates that when the locomotive engineer sounds the horn, it has be at least 15, but no more than 20 seconds in duration, and in advance of all public crossings. The train horn is sounded in a pattern of two long, one short, and one long blast. When I hear a train horn, it brings back memories of my dad. He retired in 1969, after being a member of the NASA team that helped with man's first landing on the moon. He lived in that house by the railroad tracks until he died in 1983, at the age of 75. The house was sold and that chapter in my life came to a close,

I experienced the full wrath of Mother Nature's fury when I was a member of an Army security team on a Merchant Marine ship. I was 19 and a fearless 101st paratrooper. The ship ran smack into a typhoon in the East China Sea. In the Pacific Ocean, a hurricane is called a typhoon. I've been really scared a few times in my life, but I was not prepared one day when I stepped out onto the deck. I looked up and saw monster waves 50 to 65-foot high come crashing down onto the ship. But it pales in comparison to tornadoes. I call them egg beaters. When they hit, they beat up things with destructive force winds from 70 to 318 miles an hour.

A few weeks ago my son, John asked me to go with him to make an estimate of the cost to repair a tornado damaged house in Lyon County, Kentucky. He said that someone gave the owner his name. Most of the repair work that my son does is in Tennessee. Driving towards the house, we did not see any tornado damage. My son turned onto a side road and started up a hill. Half way up the bill it started to look like a war zone. It looked like the neighborhood was hit with a bomb. Massive fallen trees had been cut to keep the single lane road open.

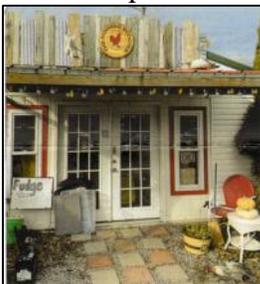
We reached the top of the hill and drove into the owner's driveway. The owner had served three years on a Navy submarine. He told me that he hoped there was no damage to the plumbing under the house, because he had no intention of going under the house. He then told me that he was claustrophobic. I scratched my head and wondered. How could a man have an extreme or irrational fear of confined places and serve three years in a Navy submarine?

I looked across the bay and observed a million-dollar plus house that was heavily



damaged. The next door neighbor's house was knocked off its foundation and pushed partly on a hill. The owner of the house that we were measuring for damages has a small antique store next to his house. It is called "The Running Rooster." He mainly does antique mail order sales. Thirty-one pictures of the inside of the store can be seen on his web

site "the running rooster.com." Next to the store, he had a large shop where he stored other antiques. The tornado ripped it off its concrete pad, beat it all to pieces, and threw



the pieces down the hill. Amazingly, the tornado spared the store with just roof damage. The store owner has 15 Plymouth Rock chickens that lay brown eggs. He sells the eggs for \$3.00 a dozen. He has regular customers that like the fresh eggs. I walked around the front of the owner's house and looked at the vinyl siding. It looked like it had been hit with shotgun blasts. The front windows were all blown into the living room.

As my son was making calculations, I observed an American Red Cross truck that just stopped on the road in front of the house. I walked down to talk to the driver. He told me



that he was a volunteer out of Denver, Colorado. The volunteer inside the truck told me that he was from Waco, Texas. They were giving out white, five gallon buckets and cleaning supplies and a large box full of numerous things. I told the driver that I appreciated his volunteer efforts. I told him that one of the great things about America is that we can all can come together in times of disasters. As the volunteers were unloading other things, out of the back of the truck, the owner of the

house came to talk to them.

My son continued to make calculations as I walked back up the hill and joined him. The American Red Cross truck drove away. We said goodbye to the home owner and drove out of the disaster area. My son asked me if I would type up the bid and email it to the home owner. I said that I would. This is one way that I can help him since he is self-employed. We stopped at a market on Highway 93, that was in the middle of nowhere, to refuel. I told my son that I suspected that the owner of the tornado damaged house just

wanted another bid. The owner already had a person that would rebuild the shop. I told my son that we had an interesting Sunday afternoon drive, and he agreed.

A little over a week later, straight line winds averaging 60 miles an hour slammed into my old house. It was blowing so hard that I thought it was going to knock the house off its foundation. My other concern is that it would blow over the three large, old maple trees in my front yard. As quickly as the winds came, they dissipated. I was holding on and thankful to have survived another severe storm. But that storm was increasing in intensity and strength, as it continued its eastward movement towards Hopkinsville.

I went outside to inspect for any damage to my old Antebellum farm house. The repairs that my son made to my metal roof were holding. The winds continued to blow steady at 16 to 25 miles an hour. Snow was forecast for Thursday and by Friday morning, the wind chills are expected to be in the single digits to just below zero. The storm that slammed into the side of my house was picking up steam as it raced towards the city of Hopkinsville. Then a tornado formed and began its eggbeater damage in the city. It ripped apart the Southern States warehouses and store. It moved toward a service station on 9th street and tore it all to pieces. It crossed the street and hit the Family Dollar and tore it all to pieces. And in what can truly be described as Divine Intervention, it spared Saints Peter & Paul Catholic Church and its large school building. It crossed the street behind the school and nearly demolished a two story house. It continues on northeast with its eggbeater destruction, and it spared neither the rich nor the poor.

In my style of writing stories, I use song and hymn lyrics and Scriptures to give encouragement. Many years ago, I enjoyed listening to a song written by Chynna Phillips, Carnie Wilson, and Glen Ballard called "Hold On." It gives encouragement. I will only use some of their lyrics: "I know there is pain. What do you lock yourself up in those chains? No one can change your life but you. Don't ever let anyone step over you. Just open your heart and your mind (Mmm). Is it really fair to feel this way inside? (Woah). Someday somebody's gonna make you want to turn around and say goodbye. Until then, baby, are you going to let 'em hold you down and make you cry? Don't you know, things can change. Things '1] go your way if you Hold On for one more day. Can you Hold On for one more day? Things '11 go your way. Hold on for one more day..."

One theme of this story is the importance of not giving up when faced with the real and emotional storms of this life. The last Christmas ornament that I was about to put on my Christmas tree is a little flat metal angel. On the angel's dress are these words: "With God all things are possible." I have experienced, when I first thank Jesus Christ, before asking Him for His assistance on a matter, that Christ tends to grant it. I believe, that if it was not in His plans to give me the talent to write stories, that I would not be writing them. I decided to keep the metal angel ornament in my pocket to remind me that with God all things possible.

The Scripture that I selected for this story is found in Romans, Chapter 8, Verse 18: "I consider that the sufferings of this present time are as nothing compared with the glory to be revealed for us." I am thankful, that even in a disaster, I can find some good. Seeing

that America flag, although it was tattered and nearly ripped in half, it was still there flying, even if it was just an inch or two off the ground. It was a hopeful sign to me. It made me realize just how blessed I am to be an American. My body may ache all the time and it is worn out. It takes me a little longer to go up the steps to my writing room. But as long as Christ continues to give me the grace upon grace upon grace, and the Breath of life to write, I shall continue to hold on in the face of Mother Nature's full fury.

John F. Hall

*Read other stories by John F. Hall and others at:

<http://www.ajlambert.com>