

In the UK and all over the world, everybody looks forward to summer weather. Perfect for drinking in the sun, relaxing at the beach or by the pool, and being carefree. In the south-east USA, “summer weather” means something very different. It means Atlantic Hurricane Season!

The key is preparedness. I live in Orlando, FL, and this year, we experienced the landfall of Hurricane Irma, our first major hurricane in 12 years. Many people who are adults in 2017 were kids or teens during the last hurricanes. Myself included. We had never bore the responsibility to prepare for a hurricane independently. More experienced residents were much more calm in the leadup and recovery.

In the leadup to a major hurricane, we are warned by emergency officials to stock up on non-perishable food, water, medical supplies, torches, and portable radios. Enough to last for 2 weeks. Depending on how close you are to water or flood-prone areas, mandatory evacuation orders may also be made. Days before the expected arrival of Irma, supermarket lines were out the door and around the block with people stocking up on supplies. There is a lot of anxiety that comes with being unsure if you’ll have water or essential supplies for the next few days or weeks.

Experiencing the storm itself was honestly more scary than I expected. In my area, we were told to expect a brush with the outer bands of the storm which would come with some strong winds and about the same amount of rain as a usual Florida thunder storm. At around 6pm, the wind began to howl, and we unexpectedly lost power. We had no lights, no electricity, no internet, and no mobile signal. It was during this time that the weather forecasters began scurrying, and it was announced that the storm had changed path. South-east Orlando (or those with the signal to be made aware) was now bracing for contact with the eastern eyewall of a Category 2 Hurricane with sustained winds of 110+ mph.

The howling of the wind and the crashing of debris flying through the streets was as scary as it would have been portrayed in a disaster movie. In hindsight, it’s comical how accurate those movies are in portraying the scariness of these storms. The scariest part I think, was that you couldn’t see a thing out of the window. You knew things were being destroyed and blown around, but there were no streetlights on, and the clouds were so thick that any natural light from the stars and the moon was extinguished.

We are very fortunate to live in a well developed community with strong buildings and helpful people. The worst of our damage was a few down trees on cars, and some homes with part of the roof missing. Because tourism is such major profit for Florida, our tourist tax pays for some amazing emergency responders who had everything cleaned up and tidy within days. Power was a different story. My house was out of power for 3 days, and others for over a week. Imagine having no aircon for a week when it’s 95 degrees Fahrenheit outside!

As fun and dramatic as it is for me to tell my hurricane stories, let’s also take time to consider people in less fortunate places like the U.S. Territories of Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands. They took the full brunt of Hurricanes Irma and Maria this year. Millions of them are still without power and clean water. The worst part is that the president has told them that they are a drain on the government budget, and will not be getting any more resources than the ones already allocated. All this while just passing new tax and budget resolutions that will give billionaires, banks, and corporations 1.4 trillion dollars in bonuses.

Enjoy learning about the power and fantasy of hurricanes, but always keep those in mind who aren’t so lucky to come out of it with thrilling stories and the privilege to tell them.