

Chasing Miami

by Skip DaLuca

One Friday I left my office fully expecting to return on Monday, This didn't happen, I sat on my porch fishing instead. It may not seem odd to you if you live on a bayou or river, but I live in New Orleans and Sunday night Katrina slammed into the Crescent City. Tuesday morning the levees broke and the city flooded. So much for going to work, I never saw my office again. Moreover the house that I spent 2 years renovating and lived in for two months became uninhabitable. Wednesday I was picked up by boat and spent many days helping rescue people, as most of the responders were from other states and did not know the neighborhoods and I was one of the few natives foolish enough to stay.



Afterward we went to the part of I-10 that wasn't flooded (causeway for anyone who knows) and from there I was transported by an army truck to a bus and then to a refugee camp in Thibodaux (90 miles SW of New Orleans) where I spent a couple of days wondering how to get in touch with my family, wondering if they knew if I made it out alive. Thursday my ex-wife, Helen, walked into the shelter, she had found where I was and came to get me. Helen truly looked like a vision from heaven. I was very thankful for her being there and was sorry that I screwed things up so bad between us, but that is another story. So I spent a week on her sofa watching news feeds, seeing the city I love so much disintegrate into anarchy.

There was so much damage to the infrastructure that any communication was impossible. Most of the repeater towers in south Louisiana were knocked down or damaged and the few left were so overloaded use of a cell phone was virtually impossible. It has been over a week since I had any contact with my wife and kids, they don't know if I'm dead or alive. The city was completely flooded and stayed that way for about a month. I never could move back into my house, most of the insurance money was used to pay off the mortgage, which left little left over for repairs. It was subsequently torn down; in fact in the block I lived on only 3 of the 7 houses are left standing.

Three years later I still have nightmares and am very sad there is no home to go to. They say home is where the heart is, I left mine in New Orleans. Many of the people who have returned are rebuilding their lives. I know that my beloved city will, in time, be restored to its former glory. However I have trouble even going back to visit relatives. When I see so many empty lots where houses once stood I remember how it was before this catastrophe; kids playing in their yards, neighbors talking, lush gardens, people waving to each other in a friendly manner and so on. It is at this point I start to break down and have flashes in my mind of helping people off the roofs of houses that are no longer there, looking at streets where, walk my dog under 10 feet of water, the ensuing chaos and the people that lost their lives needlessly.

My life has changed so completely that some days when I look at my reflection in the mirror, I only see the shell of the man I once was and on others life goes on and the wounds are slowly healing. I currently live in Miami and maybe one day I'll be able to go back, until then life on Miami Beach is not so bad, still isn't home though . (Unedited) (To be continued)