

5 Days That Forever Changed Our Lives

My name is Dave Derosier and I live in Orange Texas.

My wife and I celebrated our 50th wedding anniversary last year. We have two children and two grandchildren. Our daughter and granddaughter lived with us for ten years, up until Hurricane Harvey flooded us out. They now live by themselves in a small house, also in Orange. Our son and his wife lived in Ukraine for ten years before moving to Beaumont a few years ago as the hostilities became worse there. His wife is Ukrainian and their 10-year old son has dual citizenship.

In the previous 12 years we have lived in Orange, where we went through several hurricanes, the biggest of which were Rita and Ike.

In 2005 after Rita hit we returned from evacuation to find a huge tree through half of our house. We lived in the other half and all was repaired in about 2 ½ months.

In 2008, Ike devastated our area with flooding. The storm surge on the way in brought several feet of water, and after it passed over the winds behind it brought in several feet more. Fortunately we only saw a few inches of water in our street from Ike. Our house is several feet above the street and not in a flood zone. At that point we decided not to continue paying for the flood insurance.

In 2017 our lives were forever changed by Hurricane Harvey. This one really hit home – literally.

The following story recounts some of our experiences over 5 days. I am writing this in January 2018, more than 4 months after the storm hit.

Essentially no work has been done to our property since the storm other than as described in this story. We are still living in temporary quarters, and only this week did we start the formal process with the Small Business Administration to borrow money from federal disaster relief funds to finance the rebuild. The various delays caused by the government are separate stories in themselves, but not addressed here.

The reason for writing this story is to share a very brief but intimate, inside view of what it can be like to go through such a disaster. Not like you would see on TV or read in the news.



On Friday, August 25th of 2017, Hurricane Harvey made landfall at Corpus Christi Texas.

After five days of slowly wandering across the area, on the morning of August 30th Harvey arrived in Orange Texas – around 300 miles up the coast from Corpus Christi.

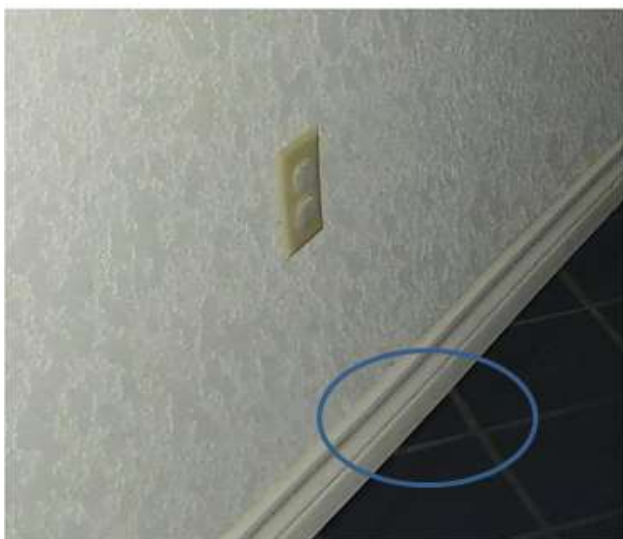


Early that Wednesday morning, at 2:30 am, I was awoken by unbelievably loud thunder directly overhead...with simultaneous huge bolts of lightning. I got up, checked the house – no water; opened the front door to look outside and it was raining so hard one could see nothing. I stepped out the door and ended up in a couple of inches of water – almost up to the threshold of the door. That was it!!

I went around and woke up the girls, told them to get everything they wanted to save up high, and we waited. At 2:55am the water started to seep through the walls and slowly creep across the floor.



The dotted line shows the edge of the water as it crept into the house through the walls starting at 2:55 am.



2:55 am. Note full baseboard showing.



3:32 am. Note baseboard now shows about 1-1.5 inches less than 37 minutes earlier.



3:35 am. Master Bedroom
About 1.5 inches covers the rugs

A half hour later with about an inch and a half,
the rugs were covered with water.



8:34 am. Master Bedroom
About 10 inches
in the last 5 hours

Five hours later
there was close to a foot of water
throughout the house.

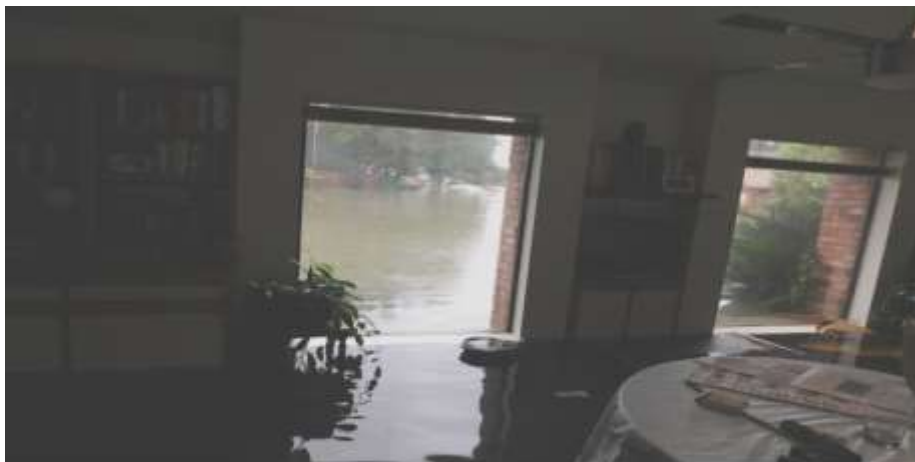


It was now about 8:30 am on Wednesday.

What a long night.



We have large fixed windows and the water was above the window sills, evenly leveled with the water outside (about 5' deep in the street). This created the effect of a neighborhood "infinity pool" looking out from the kitchen.



8:38 am. Kitchen
Water is above window sills and level with outside flood waters.
There is about 5 feet of water in the street.

Inside,
the water is close to its peak.
Here's the kitchen showing the
water about 1.5' deep
along the cabinets.



My wife sits in the kitchen
around 8:30 am Wednesday
morning and looks down the
street, across the infinity pool.

Our granddaughter, Danielle,
has been up all night and is
sleeping in a chair with her feet
in the water.



By early afternoon there was a steady stream of boats coming and going, checking on every house for anyone wanting to leave.



My wife, daughter, and granddaughter left with one of the boats in this picture. They were taken to a nearby street that was dry and transported to a church being used as a temporary shelter. From there they later were taken to a public elementary school which had not been planned as a shelter. A bit of chaos there.

They heard of openings at a hotel in Louisiana (about 8 miles away) and ventured out with neighbors to see if that would work. They ended up in a small cabin in a campground behind the hotel. Hot food in the mornings and hot food in the evenings, compliments of the hotel.

Meanwhile, I decided to stay – fearing that if I left I might not be able to get back.

Early the next morning (Thursday), the sun was out and we had a peaceful lake.

The two pictures below are pretty much the same shot as the one above with the rescue boats, but the water has receded about a foot. You can compare the water levels at our mailbox in the front yard.



This was the morning of August 31st. the day after the storm, and the waters are slowly dropping. All day I would open the front door every half hour and push the water out. Outside it was receding at about ½ inch every half hour.

In the late afternoon the water had drained from the house. I grabbed a ride out with a member of the Cajun Navy. Look them up in Google, or go to the Washington Post at https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/cajun-navy-races-from-louisiana-to-texas-using-boats-to-pay-it-forward/2017/08/28/1a010c8a-8c1f-11e7-84c0-02cc069f2c37_story.html?utm_term=.cf942b18bf67

My nephew and his wife had evacuated and were staying in an unfinished rental house that I own. He came and picked me up at the drop point and brought me to that house.

I spent the night on the floor with them and the next day he got his canoe and brought me back to my home. The water had pretty much receded from the house but still flooded the neighborhood and houses that are lower than mine.

That first day was spent taking water soaked items out of the house onto the front lawn, and trying to drain out extra water that did not seep out on its own. Four months later, a lot of that day is a blurred memory – probably due to a bit of shock.

Having the highest house in the neighborhood, we were fortunate in that none of our three cars got water in them and they survived the flood. Our neighbors were not all as fortunate; most of the cars and trucks left in the driveways or in the garages were totally destroyed.

I reunited with my family at the cabin in Louisiana that night (Friday) and spent the next two days commuting back and forth and trying to figure out what to do.

My wife works as a Branch Office Administrator (BOA) for Edward Jones Investments. Although her office had also been flooded, she was in touch with her boss and co-workers.

We were told to expect some volunteers from the company to help us clean up. Little did we know what to expect.



Sunday morning, the 3rd of September, just a couple of days since the water receded, cars and trucks and a trailer load of work equipment started arriving on the street in front of our house.

A crew of twenty Edward Jones co-workers, volunteers from around the regions, showed up ready to gut the house and pack up our belongings.

No one asked them to come. They knew we needed help and they came. Even as I write this more than 4 months later I still get emotional.

They stripped up carpets, emptied closets, cabinets, and furniture of our stuff and packed it all up – just as if they were movers. Hard goods into boxes, soft goods into bags. Others went to work moving soaked/damaged furniture out to the street. Still others tore into the kitchen cabinets and gutted everything that had been underwater.

They were there all day and didn't finish. The next day, another crew of twenty volunteers from Edward Jones showed up in front of the house to continue the work.

Some of them from Sunday had their own flooded homes to tend to and could only take a single day. The rest came back and even more joined in, so we had twenty of them again on day two – Labor Day.

The volunteer work-crew from Edward Jones on Day 1 (Sunday)



The volunteer work-crew from Edward Jones on Day 2 (Monday – Labor Day)



And here's what it looked like when they left us.



Some of the "GOOD" from all this

Without the help from the Edward Jones volunteers, I'm not sure what we would have done. I do know that the work that they did was an absolute necessity for a flooded home, would not have been accomplished until a long time after the flood without their help. And such a delay would have created many more issues – including mold.

Other regions of Edwards Jones around the country "adopted" offices that were affected by the flooding, asking people in local offices to set up "wish lists" on Amazon. Co-workers in those other regions then went into the wish lists, selected and paid for items. Items ranged from gift cards to household supplies to furniture to appliances, to anything else needed that Amazon supplies. No one asked them, they just volunteered.

The Cajun Navy and the Cajun Army were not asked to come across the Texas border and help, they just did. They rescued countless families and pets from flooded properties. Just because it needed to be done.

We had a lot of antique wooden furniture pieces, some going back to the 1800's, some custom built for a hotel my grandfather constructed on Cape Cod in the mid-1920s. We were fortunate to find a furniture restorer in Orange who salvaged and cleaned up many of them. Again, without asking, he told us that the price would be half of what he normally charges...because of the circumstances.

Our mortgage company sent us a note saying we could be late on our payments if needed, and if a payment was late they would not report it to the credit bureaus. Other companies that bill us said the same thing.

I am a Life Member of the Beaumont Lodge of the Beneficent and Protective Order of Elks. I got a call from the Texas State Elks and was asked if we were affected by the flood. I told them our story – they said thanks for sharing. About three weeks later a check arrived in the mail from the Elks – with a note saying they hoped it might help us. No one asked them, we did not have to apply to get their help. They just did it! And did it two times more since then.

Their motto is, "Elks Care, Elks Share".

It's impossible to recount all of the small acts of kindness and caring that came our way (and others needing assistance). The ones listed above are just examples. **Our heartfelt thanks go out to all of them.**

We hope to be back in our home by June of this year, 10 months after the storm.

Harvey brought us, and many others, lots of extreme experiences – the good, the bad, and the ugly.

It all started with ***5 Days That Forever Changed Our Lives.***