

Epilogue

For the last four and a half years I have labored on the writing of this book. The task seemingly endless, as I also worked in my “real” job as a Quality Control and R&D Manager for Duro-Last Roofing in Saginaw, Michigan. The progress has been excruciatingly slow due to the demands of my day gig.

In the past five years, I have managed to invent two new products for the company I work for, acted as Chairman of the local American Society of Quality (ASQ) Saginaw Chapter, published three technical articles, a half a dozen beer-can chicken related articles, was Technical Chairman of the Vinyl Roofing Division of the Chemical Film and Fabrics Association (CFFA), worked as a Task Group chair for two industry roofing sustainability standards, and received an Award of Recognition from my colleagues at ASTM in the D08 Roofing and Waterproofing Main Committee.

It has been one hell of a ride to say the least.

The Katrina project has been a mission of love and respect. The more I have learned about the people who experienced Katrina, the more my psyche has been transformed into a philosophy of, “Don’t sweat the small stuff”; and that venerable Zen idea of living in the now. The past can’t be changed, the future is too variable to invest emotion in, and the ‘here and now’ at his moment is what will define the future. I have learned this from the people of the Gulf Coast.

I think a higher power has directed me down this path. All the twists, interventions and convolutions that have unfolded in the course of this book are too complimentary and synergistic to be coincidence. The stories of the human spirit in this book are a reflection of a history that needs to be told and celebrated. A reflection of what we as Americans need to come back to. A reflection of love, generosity, compassion, perseverance, all in the hope of building something better. I think as a society we have lost a bit of that. It is my hope that some of that can be recaptured and re-instilled into our hearts and minds.

As I alluded to before, the path of this book has been sequential and interestingly, some significant interventions and redirections occurred during the last 4.5 year course of this project.

As time passed, the stories trickled in. People who participated would contact other people who would, in turn, share their experiences. After a time, I had a network of people motivating me, providing input, and encouraging the continuation of the project.

Over the four and half year period, many interviews occurring years ago reflect the stories of that time. In many cases, these people have been difficult to reach for their addendums and ‘updates’ into the current time.

Much has changed in the areas affected by Katrina. The residents have persevered, rebuilt, and tried to stake another claim to a future in their homeland.

Their time is demarcated between pre-Katrina and post-Katrina. The people play with a little bit more intensity. There is a bit more abandon in their reveling. There is, perhaps bit more passion in their day to day lives. The phrase, 'I love you,' is heard more frequently; even in its usage as a casual greeting between strangers.

Many I have talked to have found and blessed their Katrina experiences in bringing their families closer together; and a resolve to never take anything for granted again. Katrina also has caused many to explore a deeper and more intense relationship with their spirituality.

People who never actively pursued a religion or spiritual practices have embraced faith at a fundamental level. I guess there's truth to the phrase, "There are no atheists in fox holes."

Of course at the time of this writing, after five years, all were beginning to feel like they were finally emerging from the affects of the storm. Now another storm of potentially worse ramifications than Katrina is creeping its way into these people's lives in the form of globs of crude oil.

From April 20th through July 2010, a ruptured British Petroleum (BP) oil well located about 90 miles off the coast of Louisiana and a mile below the surface has been pushing almost 2 million gallons a day of its foul contents into the Gulf ecosystem.

At least with hurricanes, as fierce an enemy as they can be, they are predictable in what they do, though extreme in the face of man; their methods and ways are understood. The affects of the BP oil disaster are incalculable and can only be guessed. The destruction of an ecosystem as vibrant as the Gulf and the coastal areas that border her are yet to be seen. Modern humanity has never witnessed the kind of destruction this kind of disaster could become.

Scientists can spout theories, doomsday aficionados can preach the end of the world; but in the end, we can only hope and pray that this event will allow a path to recovery...We just don't know!

The National Hurricane Center has indicated that global weather patterns are poised to make the 2010 hurricane season particularly dangerous. Speculation based upon intricate scientific modeling; albeit sobering in its contemplation.

Now we have a Gulf of Mexico, whose surface has patches of millions of gallons of life-sucking oil floating on the surface. Thousands of fish and entire pods of dolphins are observed floating belly up in the warm Gulf sun. There are Sea birds, fish, and all manner of aquatic wildlife along the once pristine coastal beaches coated and dying from the toxic ooze.

Hundreds of volunteers are attempting to build booms and barriers to the steady onslaught of this modern creeping Black Death. 550 oil skimmers are traversing the Gulf trying to contain and round up as much of the stuff as possible...I pray for their success.

Take the current situation and amplify it by the hurricane potential for the season. What happens then? We have seen Hurricane Alex; though far to the south;

actively disrupt remediation efforts through his distant surge. What would another Katrina do with the added element of petroleum goo to sling where fate may take it?

Obviously there is much to be concerned about. The people of New Orleans, her surrounding parishes and the Gulf Coast shake their heads, put one foot in front of the other and keep moving forward.

Whatever the region's future has to offer it is with confidence and pride that I say these people will deal with it. They will buck up, and do what needs to be done to get the job done and preserve their homes and lifestyles. They will work together as community families, they will rebuild; they will support each other, and emerge whole again on the other side. Katrina has taught them well.

They have come to learn that in the end, all we really have are ourselves, the people we love, our neighbors, our hearts and our spirits. If we can learn anything from these amazing people of the Gulf Coast, it is that in the end, all we have is each other. Our spirits, our determination and our sense of family (in our homes and in our communities) will get us through whatever calamity may befall us.

We are Americans, we are loyal, and when the time comes, we get down to it...perhaps we are all destined to hop upon that screamin' freight train. When we do, let's ride it together with our heads high and determination in our spirits, just as our Gulf Coast family has taught us to do.

The End