2019

Life Changing Event: Hurricane Katrina

Kieara Dawson

Xavier University of Louisiana, pathways@xula.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.xula.edu/pathways_journal

Recommended Citation

Available at: https://digitalcommons.xula.edu/pathways_journal/vol2016/iss1/4

This Essay is brought to you for free and open access by XULA Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Pathways by an authorized editor of XULA Digital Commons. For more information, please contact ksiddell@xula.edu.
Hurricane Katrina changed the lives of many on August 29, 2005. During the time, I lived outside the city of New Orleans, but I was affected by the storm both directly and indirectly. After the storm hit, many citizens of New Orleans, including my relatives there, were left with nothing. Hurricane Katrina took physical belongings as well as people’s emotional stability. However, the physical damage could not compare to the echoes of emotional damage the hurricane caused.

Seeing the city where I was born in ruins was hard. Trees were stripped of their leaves, foundations were stripped of the houses that lie on them, and people were stripped of their belongings and what was once called home. New Orleans seemed gone for many. The beautiful architecture and rich culture of New Orleans were no longer as beautiful or as rich. The city was a wasteland of broken spirits and lost hope. People beyond New Orleans felt this wave of hopelessness that washed over our state. My household was affected because our New Orleans relatives lost everything. So, we had to adjust our lives significantly to help them. Not that we completely escaped damage. Our house wasn’t completely ruined, but we had damages to the exterior and the roof and some broken windows. The emotional pain, though, was worse than the physical damage. There were some programs in place with people willing to help those who lost everything; unfortunately, there was no helping the feeling of hopelessness. Material items can be replaced; however, emotional stability cannot be gained back immediately.

Seeing your city in such poor condition is challenging, but being a refugee in your own state is emotionally and physically toiling. My New Orleans family had to come live with us in our one-family house. There were eleven people living in a three-bedroom home. Immediately
after the storm there was no electricity, so the living situation was even more uncomfortable. I will never forget how my room was taken over by adults. My cousins, siblings, and I were younger, so we slept together on the living room floor. Packed together like a deck of cards, I felt like a refugee in my own house. Going back to school, I felt like a stranger among so many new children there displaced by the storm. I had no escape and I felt trapped, and the city’s feeling of hopelessness washed over me.

Personally, the hardest part of the Hurricane was the rebuilding phase. It was hard to try to salvage the life you had before. I was already emotionally scarred and so was my family. I watched my family worry about how they were going to fix their house and how they were going to replace everything that was lost. You can replace physical items, but you cannot replace your feelings. I started to resent living in Louisiana after watching my family barely get back on their feet. Many decided to start new lives elsewhere so they wouldn’t have to go through that again, and others decided to go back home to try again. My family decided to try again, and that was worse than just starting over in a new city. Going back to New Orleans and seeing their houses was my most life-altering part of the ordeal. Hearing about the devastation and seeing it first-hand are completely different. It looked as if Katrina had blown down the house and taken all the belongings with ease. I had never seen a more terrible sight. Even years after Hurricane Katrina, our family is still weary of hurricane season, and we do not hesitate to evacuate. After going through such a life-changing event, I relate to others who are victims of natural disasters, such as Hurricanes Sandy and Isaac.

Many people have had life-changing events happen. Sometimes the worst part isn’t the actual event, but the waves of emotional toil that follow. Those emotions can still be triggered by memories, and remembering can shape one’s outlook on life. Emotional damage can alter
someone’s self-esteem and mental health. Katrina made some people never want to look back or deal with hurricanes again, so they moved away. They were so tremendously scarred that they fled. However, life-changing experiences can also make you stronger and Hurricane Katrina made my family and me stronger.