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Katrina, The Hurricane, A Catalyst for CHANGE

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New Orleans, Saturday @ 3pm I was on my way to the recording studio, I get a call from the owner of the studio saying that we have to cancel the session because there is a hurricane warning and he has to first secure his house and then secure the studio. I thought to my self whats the big deal we had a hurricane warning 6 weeks ago, and another hurricane warning six weeks before that, and they both turned out to be mild. But after I tuned into mainstream media I realized the city officials had become very insistent, and strongly urging that everyone evacuate as soon as possible. It was then that I realized that this one could be very dangerous. I'd better take it seriously.

I had 24 hours to consider what other THINGS are important to me, other than my life, and my loved ones. I grabbed the (necessary) THINGS from my residence, and a few sentimental THINGS, and left the rest behind. THINGS become so abstract and empty in that situation.

Sunday at 4pm, we packed the car with just a couple of bags, thinking that we will go to visit my sick aunt in Texas and return to New Orleans in a few days when the storm passes. I really did not believe that this would be the big one, but I wasn't prepared to take the chance that could be fatal. Obviously it is not everyday, that you become a part of a mass exodus of people, fleeing from the potential life threatening dangers of a violent force of nature like Hurricane Katrina. From the moment I realized we were in real danger, all of my actions and feelings felt suspended like in a dream, suspended until the reality crashed into a nightmare.

A nervous caravan of cars, driving ten miles an hour for hundreds of miles was the result of a million people trying to leave the city at the same time. In all the confusion, instead of going to Texas my original destination, we somehow got redirected towards the city of Atlanta (which is luckily where my Mom lives) because of the contraflow emergency traffic system we all had to follow.

There were petrol gas shortages for hundreds of miles through Mississippi where I was born and parts of Alabama. I finally found some petrol gas about eight hours later, I was very lucky that I started with a full tank. We were still in the path of Katrina, and if we had run out of gas, we would have been stuck on the side of the road, like many other people were, stranded. The thought of running out of gas in the path of the hurricane created a mental urgency that tested my balance to the extreme, in other words I was trying my best not to freak out.

It's Monday 3am, we're exhausted from the stress and driving, and there were no hotel rooms vacant for hundreds of miles, they were all booked up, and like many other people, we had to try to catch a bit of sleep for a couple of hours in the car after about 14 hours of driving under stress and back to back traffic, at 6am we got back on the road still in Mississippi, and Katrina was just about to hit, only a few hours later. We made it out just in time and with great relief I finally arrived at my destination in Atlanta safely.

I feel very thankful that I had a car to get into and escape, and enough money to get a hotel room if I needed to, and loved ones and relatives to go to for refuge, unlike a lot of other people who did not have those options. My prayers are with the survivors, and the people who lost their lives in this disaster.

At the moment I do not know the condition of my house, there is no electricity or running water in the whole city, and very limited to no phone access. City officials are asking people who did evacuate not to come back to New Orleans until notified, some of the roads and highways are flooded or damaged, it could be weeks or even months before they provide the city with the basic accommodations needed, and perhaps years before "The Crescent City" will operate as a city again. I will miss it very much. I am in a quiet but relentless shock.

One week later this natural disaster morphs into an organizational disaster and a national disgrace. It has now been revealed that the mayor did not properly evacuate the city, leaving the most vulnerable such as nursing homes, the mentally and physically disabled, as well as people without cars or financial means any way to evacuate they city. Local officials only provided the citizens of New Orleans who needed assistance evacuating free transportation to the Superdome. With minimal security forces at the Superdome, the city was not equipped to manage and protect thousands of people and provide them with emergency food and water in case the results of the hurricane immobilized the city indefinitely. Unfortunately this was a grave mistake.

In addition, apparently the governor did not request enough national guard assistance from the feds in time enough for prompt and effective rescue missions to take place on Tuesday, which resulted in delays that caused more suffering and deaths, and general anarchy in the city from criminal elements and looting from desperate people trying to survive. Then last but not least, the federal government took too long to respond when the governor's request finally did come in. At the moment that is the big question, WHY?

This current administration has been good at selective delays when it comes to the Kyoto treaty, the Palestine/Israel conflict, and the Rwanda Massacre to name just a few, as well as lack of competence and security that allowed the 9-11 attack to happen the way it did. This and many other international conflicts could have been avoided.

I also believe this current administration has been insensitive to a fair election process. I think all of these factors and more have contributed to the slow result of the Katrina relief effort and the preventative measures that should have been and could have been taken to protect our fellow citizens from bureaucratic breakdowns. Politicians become complacent and careless when their actions are not monitored very closely. In my opinion this administration has blood on their hands.

I am angry, disappointed and deeply saddened by the practices of our political systems that are supposed to represent the people's best interest. and baffled by the communities that allow it, by not becoming more involved and firstly holding ourselves accountable for the state of the nation, as well as holding our elected officials accountable for our well being, as well as the well being of our environment.

I judge my country and other countries by the way they treat their most vulnerable citizens, the way they treat the environment. As long as there are people dying from neglect by their governments, and the environment continues to deteriorate from the abuse and indifference, all that we have achieved as a society means very little.

Throughout my elementary school years was I taught to pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America, every single day as a part of a ritualistic class room mantra, although ironically, civil rights abuses were allowed by law and was being committed by the government and perpetuated throughout the society. But somehow, I still took for granted that the government was on my side when I was a little girl. When I grew up I came to know how wrong my brainwashed perception was. That was a very sad day.

Popular thinking says I am supposed to be American because I was born there, but what has this country ever done for me or my family, my race or my gender, that wasn't fought for after much bloodshed. What have the corporations and the political structures that run this country ever done for me? I do not feel patriotic, why should I? We, this constitution has not lived up to the promise of liberty and justice for all, only for some. What does being American really mean?

I did not know of the history of atrocities that previous administrations had orchestrated, I did not really grasp what slavery was about until I viewed it from a world perspective, I did not see the stark contrast of inequities, because my environment was a part of a delusional perception exacerbated by the propoganda of media. I had to first admit that almost all of our institutions of education, religion, healthcare, government and even culture was just one perspective, and not necessarily the best perspective. We are not the most superior as I was brainwashed to believe. I began the process of deprogramming myself. The REAL AMERICA, layer by layer the truth becomes more and more obvious and unavoidable, I am a citizen of the planet earth, humanity is my country.

I now say we need to look to a greater mind than yours George "Bully" Bush, you and your administration cannot do it alone, you must be inclusive and learn from other systems that have less poverty, and a good healthcare, education system and workforce.

There are many good people often unrecognized who are in true service to the people in need, these people are the hope of America, and my respect and thanks for this great example of the human spirit. In spite of our arrested development there are a lot of beautiful things on this planet to be inspired by. I went to New Orleans over one year ago, searching for inspiration, and I found one the of the richest music cultures in the world, my experiences there have now been suspended in memories and hope that one day, my "Discovery of Amazing" in America's most unique city will live again on the streets of the "Big Easy".

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