

Lessons from IKE
By Beverly Denver

Hurricane Ike blew across Houston in the dark and eerie, pre-dawn hours of September 13 with an intensity that left us shocked and awed. While here, Ike did devilish deeds. It knocked down power lines and uprooted trees. It blew out windows and lifted roofs right off our homes and businesses. And, in low-lying areas, it brought floodwaters right through front doors. In short, Hurricane Ike created a massive mess!

In the wake of the hurricane, we were left without electricity, reduced water pressure and concerns about the purity of the water we did have. We were left without telephone and cable services. And, adding insult to injury, we were left without the Internet!

For the first time in most of our lives, we were without all the basic services we had come to know and depend on! How we'd deal with the situation was of great importance and of utmost concern.

Well, hello world! News flash! Houstonians responded well — very well!

About 12 hours after the storm hit, I jumped in my car and ventured out to survey the damage done in my own neighborhood. On street after street, I saw neighbors helping neighbors! Doing what needed to be done with good humor and random acts of kindness.

I saw them working together — lifting fallen branches out of the drainage ditches, boarding up broken windows, putting tarps on exposed roofs and, yes, firing up barbecue pits to host impromptu block parties.

Oddly enough, my neighbors seemed to be okay, more than okay, despite the serious hardships they were now facing!

Later, when the severity of the situation had been fully assessed, and we realized getting basic services back would take awhile — in some cases, a long while — one might have expected the worse. But, on the contrary, people here were amazingly patient and accepting — and willing to make the most of a bad situation.

One neighbor told me, "Well, if nothing else, Hurricane Ike has quickly improved my vocabulary. Before the storm, I always thought a pod was a shell holding peas. Now I know a "pod" is a Point of Delivery. I've also learned what MREs are 'Meals Ready to Eat.' Who knew?"

Another neighbor said, "Hurricane Ike has taught me not to take so many things for granted and to be more grateful. Like during these past few days. I'm still without power, but the weather has turned unseasonably cool. What a blessing! I find myself thinking more about that than I do how long it will be before I get to watch Jay Leno again."

A few days after the storm, when driving around town was not so perilous, I happened to notice that my favorite Starbucks had re-opened.

"Hallelujah!" I said, as I took the first right turn I came to and circled back. "Maybe the Internet is working there!"

And, of course, it was!

At that Starbucks, I saw evidence of more random acts of kindness and Ike lessons being played out there.

On every seat and barstool, sat displaced professionals like myself (both male and female) trying to keep up with the work of the day via their laptops. Several had brought extension cords and multi-headed electrical plugs with them, so more people could hook into a single power outlet. One man even brought along an extra laptop, in case someone needed to borrow one.

History will record the fury of Hurricane Ike left its ugly mark on our city. No doubt about it, that massive storm hit us hard and hurt.

But, Ike also taught us lessons — of empathy and generosity. And, in so doing, Ike slowed us down and softened our hearts to the challenges of others. That mark is beautiful. It's the mark of a great city. Let's pray it remains indelible!