

Looking in the rearview mirror, I saw a smile on Jordan's face for the first time in days. After a half hour interview, Jordan was in the program and we were in Orlando. We decided to stop there, thank God, get lunch and shop for clothes at the outlets, as all of his clothes were in his apartment in New Orleans.

While at lunch, Jordan's phone rang; it was the director from the Syracuse University Study Abroad Program. She had had so many calls from students that she was just getting around to returning them. She told Jordan that if he could get to a computer and file an application, that he might be able to go to London through Syracuse University. Their program was not charging Tulane students tuition, so if Jordan got into it we would only have to pay for housing and his flight (a nice perk since we are still paying fall tuition to Tulane). The Syracuse program was also a month and a half longer, starting Labor Day.

At the nearest Kinko's, Jordan completed the application and again spoke to the director at Syracuse University who told us that they would review the application and let us know within 48 hours (despite the holiday) if he was accepted to their program. We were so excited as we headed to the outlets. Jordan replaced some of his clothing and Polo, when they found out that he was from New Orleans, gave us a discount on top of their already discounted prices.

Saturday (9/3/05), at about 1:00 p.m., Jordan received an e-mail from Syracuse University welcoming him into their abroad program. Once again we all went into action. I booked Jordan a flight to London for Monday morning; my husband called American Express to see if he could get Jordan a credit card (they had a card to our house by 6:00 that evening); and Jordan packed his new clothes and made a list of what he still needed.

Since arriving in London, Jordan has been taking classes and living in a house with seven other boys he knows from Tulane, and he has also had the opportunity to travel throughout Europe. He sounds happy and says his classes are good, but he cannot wait to return to Tulane in January.

As far as New Orleans goes, a FEMA representative has let me know that Jordan's frat house suffered wind damage; she also said that there is massive rebuilding occurring in the entire Uptown/Garden District; we also know that the house behind Jordan was looted, and his landlord has told me that there was water in the bottom apartment of the frat house and mold, but he still wants rent from everyone in the house. Tulane has lawyers helping their students with situations like this, pro-bono. We don't know at this point what condition Jordan's apartment is in. My husband and I plan to visit after Thanksgiving to assess the situation and the area, and see if Jordan will be able to live in his fraternity house upon his return in January. We also know that all that Jordan and the rest of our family has gone through is nothing compared to the thousands who have lost their loved ones, homes, jobs and all of their belongings, and our hearts go out to them. Yet everyone in our home, especially Jordan, has a yearning for New Orleans and a love for it. I know that Jordan and his friends want to get back there to be together and help rebuild Tulane and New Orleans.

It is important to note that the Tulane administration, led by president Scott Cowan, could not have done a more outstanding job throughout this catastrophe. They have been in constant contact with the students and parents, advising us of situations and giving us updates. They have graciously extended a free summer semester of up to 9 free credits for any Tulane student registered as a full time student in the spring. My son already let me know that he will be there this summer. ❖

The Stress of Storms

By Mindy Appel

The effects of trauma this hurricane season have cut to the core for many of us. From Texas to Florida, we now share an understanding, a unity, and a much deeper compassion for one another.

Trauma has suddenly affected us. It moves us beyond what we know as our everyday reality, challenging us to incorporate the devastation of this new unexpected and intrusive experience. And as

we are experiencing it, we can also observe how our friends and family cope with stress.

Be gentle with yourself. It will take time to heal.

When I evacuated New Orleans (my home for 25 years) the day before Hurricane Katrina, it was incomprehensible that I would be in the midst of the worst natural disaster in the history of the United States. Katrina's chaos was a hurricane of devastating proportion, incredible loss, and irreparable damage. Like sudden death, I was forced to say good-bye. Now in south Florida, I was faced with more devastation after Wilma's wrath.

Wilma was frightening; most of us actually witnessed the destruction and heard what sounded like a freight train coming through. These experiences are highly intrusive and invasive to our sense of safety and security. Though the hurricane is over now, and it's been sunny ever since, Wilma's destruction was, and still is, severe.

While basic needs of food and shelter are met as soon as possible following a hurricane, its emotional toll will increasingly unfold over time. The seemingly endless adjustments that families must make may contribute additional stress on relationships, work, and daily living.

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) can develop after someone experiences trauma. Symptoms of this disorder include anxiety, fear that the trauma will repeat itself, nightmares, hypervigilance, palpitations, intrusive recollections, difficulty concentrating, emotional numbness, and a loss of interest or motivation in activities.

So what can you do for yourself? It is important to talk about what you have experienced. Express your shock, disbelief, sadness, grief, anger, and fears. No emotion is wrong. Many people express their storm stories because they need to replay it out loud in order to integrate it internally. Do not isolate yourself. While there may be a strong tendency towards this, seek out and connect with friends, relatives, neighbors, coworkers, religious organizations, or any other outlet which brings you comfort.

Regain a sense of direction. Begin setting and working on immediate personal and family priorities to help you and your loved ones preserve or regain a sense of hope, purpose, and self esteem. If there is any up side to a catastrophic event, it will be in your increased awareness and acute recognition of what is truly important to you and the people you care about. This shift in your thinking will change you – for the better.

It is extremely important to remember that you are having normal reactions to a highly abnormal event. Be gentle with yourself. It will take time to heal. Learning to recognize the normal reactions that are occurring will help you better understand these feelings and hopefully feel more comfortable and effective in coping with them. Appreciate that each day is a new opportunity to take steps toward recovery.

Mindy Appel, LCSW, ACSW, LMFT attended Tulane University in New Orleans. Post-Katrina she is now residing in the Boca Raton area. ❖