

Tornado Learnings (2011)

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Everyone has a story about their reaction to disaster: Pearl Harbor, 9/11, or our recent slew of vicious tornados and the resulting power outage. What's yours? What did you learn about you?

There were two things, for me. The first — and expected — reaction was relief and gratitude for the smaller blessings of this life, those things we never know we'll miss until they're gone. So many of them this time were the results of this two-edged blade called "technology" — e-mail, ice, television, gasoline, air conditioning, washing my hair with nice warm water. Eventually, internet hotel reservations for our planned escape!

The second learning was more personal: my understanding of my own reaction to change, stress, and the unknown. I'm not all that pleased with what I found when I looked inside me, but it was... educational.

I know that I don't flap. I don't panic, and can manage nearly anything, and I like that. But I learned more about the churning that's going on inside; I do not do ambiguity and uncertainty and the unknown well. Should I sign up to be an arctic explorer? No way: nor Captain Cook, nor Livingstone in Africa, nor Mother Teresa. I don't think I'd do "first responder" well; answering that phone call for what could be anything from a cat-up-a-tree to Armageddon is not my thing.

After a couple of days of privation-training, we decamped to an involuntary holiday in Tennessee. Even the question of how long we were to be there was wearing, in itself, even though our living situation was so much better. My wife and I enjoyed that vaunted "time for each other" that we hear so much about; there was also an unfortunate tendency to crabbiness (I'm sorry, my beloved!), some impatience, and an air of dogged determination that's really not like me!

But back to the blessings, that list of what I missed, and what I'll appreciate more, at least for awhile: Hot and cold! —That steaming morning mug of tea, and ice. A vacuum cleaner. Toast. Not having to ration the remaining charge in the batteries in computer, cell-phone, and

radio. The ominously dwindling supply of gasoline in the car, which would provide a life-link to freedom.

Did I mention radio? The local stations that stayed on air tried their best; they combined staff, cooperated, shifted format to "news and question-answering." Catalog their topics: Generators. Gasoline. Medical information. Public safety and security. The next civic news conference. Open highways. It was priority-list turnover.

I missed my NPR station, because the others weren't the same. In fact, nothing was the same. I don't how long it will be until what's different becomes the same.