

# Hurricane Damage Lufkin, Texas

## The Stapleton Family

# Timeline

**I may have messed up a little on the dates...**

## **September 23, 2005**

Huge pine tree, about 100 feet tall, fell on storage area and home office. Storage area is a total loss with substantial loss of contents. Branch went through home office roof with major damage to roof but I believe most contents are protected. Tree fell over power lines and they are on the ground. Rear fence is almost a total loss. Wrought iron arbor at patio entrance is bent, but appears it can be fixed. Limbs down in front yard but there appears to be no damage. Lost electricity at about 6am. Worst of storm is estimated to hit here at about 10am

Started. Calling Davis Ins. Reached Larry Davis at 6pm. Told him electric company said to stay away from tree and wait until their people arrived. We put tarps over everything we could.

We found the electric pole was split about 1/3 way up and we were told to not touch anything and to stay out of home until further notice. Davis told us to listen to the electric company.

TXU said they would be by between 10 and 11pm to remove tree and start work. They did not show up  
Inventory of damaged items will be done on Sunday.

## **September 24, 2005**

Could not do anything significant today. We moved to the shelter at our church (1<sup>st</sup> Presbyterian, Lufkin) and helped with the other evacuees. Tried contacting TXU but got different answers from everyone I spoke with. I got some help from Emory Kennedy to further protect everything we could. We were able to get into the storage area and cover a fair amount with tarps. Looks like all books in the storeroom are ruined. Bought some plywood, tarps and plastic ties to protect what we could. Kennedy is the maintenance man at the church and I hire him when I need extra help.

## **September 25, 2005**

Someone from TXU came by and looked at the tree. They were going to try and figure out how to remove it. Said they would be back in an hour or two but they never showed up. There was nothing else we could do because of the power lines laying in the yard.

## **September 26, 2005**

Sometime in the afternoon TXU cut the power to the lines that were laying in our yard. I still have not been able to find out anything. Still different answers from different people. The left hand does not know what the right hand is doing and no one wants to make a decision. Larry Davis, Davis Insurance, said to go ahead and start working with the contractor. I contacted Don Langston, a fellow Rotarian, for a recommendation of someone who did residential work. Don only does commercial. He sent someone over who seems to be highly competent -James Taylor. James is a residential contractor and has his own plumbers, electricians, masons, and carpenters. He has excellent references. He did not want to do any hurricane repairs but agreed to help me because Langston had asked him. Contractors of any kind are almost impossible to get at this time. Kennedy came back for a few hours to help where he could.

## **September 27, 2005**

Still no decision from TXU. Finally in the afternoon I contacted Bob Brown, President of TXU. He is not really a friend, but his wife taught my two daughters at St. Cyprians and we do know each other. I told him I was not looking for any favoritism, but really needed to find someone at TXU that would make a decision. 28 homes in Southridge are without electricity because of the indecision. He asked for my suggestions. TXU had several tree people look at the tree but only one was confident that he could get it out. That was Easley Wrecker/ Crane. Easley would not do the actual cutting, but would show the chainsaw people how to do it and he would lift the pieces out with his crane. Brown told me to get Easley over and to have Easley call him on his personal line when he was ready for chainsaws. That was at 4:30pm when I spoke to Bob. Before 6pm the tree was moved. Brown was able to make things happen and that was much appreciated.

I hired four of the Hispanics who were at the shelter to move whatever they could out of the storage area into our garage and Libby's office. They were incredible workers and did a fantastic job. I spent Wednesday night in our home. Libby went to Nacogdoches and stayed with our middle daughter, Happy.

### **September 28, 2005**

Spent the day going through as much of the stuff that was moved from the storeroom as possible. Lots of water damage but most of my collection of Civil War relics, fossils, minerals, etc. were not of a type that could be damaged by water. All of the signed photos and autographs that were in the fireproof file and my Ft. Knox safe, are in good shape. Haven't come across the ones that were in the storeroom yet. They are in one of the boxes in the garage and Lib's office. Many books were rendered useless. All of my original software applications were soaked. I do not believe the CDs were damaged but the boxes and manuals are all ruined. I'm afraid some of the electronic stuff may be ruined. You can smell a lot of mildew. Can't get to most of the boxes in the garage and Lib's office because there's too much stuff stacked up filling the areas.

### **September 29, 2005**

Electricity was back on this morning. I am not sure, but believe that I am responsible for the crane charges.

I started going through the stuff in the garage to see what was ruined. Kennedy is coming over later to help me with that.

I have taken numerous photos throughout this process. So far there are 17 pages with 4 photos per page. The contractor came by this morning and said his crew will be here first thing Friday morning (tomorrow). They came as he said, but all they could do was clean up and prepare for the re-construction. He cannot do any work until he gets a building permit from the city.

Electricity went off again.

**October 8, 2005** - Electricity is back on again.

### **November 21, 2005**

If you have never had to deal with the bureaucracy, you are very lucky. My contractor is one of the best in the area. He has been attempting to get a building permit from the city permit office since the end of September. It was one problem after another and the people in the permit office don't give you a list of things that have to be done. They tell you something that needs to be done; you do it; then they give you something else that needs to be done. My storeroom was built 26 years ago on a utility company easement. The previous owner got the authorization to build on that easement from the utility company and that authorization was in both the city's file and attached to my property deed. The first problem was that I couldn't get the building permit because it was on the utility company's easement. The day I found that out I got a letter from the utility company and they faxed it to the permit department. Two weeks went by and nothing happened. I finally went down to the permit department and found they had never sent the letter to the engineering department. I got that taken care of and then they told me that the property was in the flood plan and I couldn't build there unless I raised the floor of the building 13". I understand the problem with the flood plan, but our property is on the highest point in our subdivision and in years past when we have had record rains, the water just bearly came over our curb. The city took money from FEMA in 1998 and FEMA required a new flood plan. The required elevation was over 13" higher than it was when we purchased our home some 26 years ago. As a result, my storage shed must be build some 13" higher than our living quarters. Dumber than dirt, but we have to do it. Rather than putting it back on the concrete slab, we have to build it as a pier and beam and have ramps down to my office and my wife's office. It would cost a fortune to add 13" to the 650 sq. ft. concrete slab.

The delay has caused me major problems. Everything from the storeroom and office had to be moved into our garage and my wife's home office. Boxes and stuff are stacked 6' high and it is near impossible to find anything because there is no room to move boxes around to look for stuff. I've got a lot of customers who are really upset with me. I have offered to cancel orders, but that doesn't satisfy some. It will be after the storeroom is rebuilt before I will be able to locate most items.

### **November 28, 2005**

The contractor called to tell me our building permit was finally issued. The problem is that his crews are drying in several homes he is

building and he has to wait until a crew is available to start working on the storage area.

### **December 1, 2005**

The contractor called again to tell me that he will have a crew available on Tuesday, December 6. He said he had ordered the building materials for the storage area. They were delivered the next day, December 2. Looks like something is beginning to happen. The contractor told me it would take about 8-10 days to complete the 650 sq. foot storage area. Once it is completed, it will take me about two weeks to put up the shelving, move everything back into the storeroom, and finally get organized again. To say this has been a disaster is an understatement. Our damage was very minor compared to many of those south of us, but as minor as it was, it has disrupted my business for well over two months.

### **January 27, 2006**

It took much longer than anticipated to get the office completed. It's been finished a little over a week and my estimate of taking a couple of weeks to get organized was a pipe dream. I am just going to have to take whatever time it takes to get everything inventoried, sorted out and put away where I can find it. I've hired a friend of Scott's to put up the shelving in my office and the new storeroom. Can't do much until that shelving is up.

### **February 21, 2006**

Bruce's 5-day job putting up the shelving has taken a month, but he did an outstanding job. I've got more than double the shelf space in my office than I had before. The roof in the new storeroom has two bad leaks. Taylor has come out several times and thought he had fixed it, but when it rains again, it still leaks.

### **February 23, 2006**

We have finally been able to get enough boxes out of the garage so Libby can park in there again. We started emptying boxes and putting stuff away. Very slow process because I am inventorying everything before we put it away. No damage to any of my Civil War relics, but a lot of the displays I had created and not laminated had to be taken apart. They got wet and were ruined by mildew.

Things are going very slow. I had to throw away all of the books that were in the storeroom. I really hated to have to do that.

Three of the six binders containing the SM collection are ruined. Unfortunately that collection was stacked on the floor of the storeroom and the water came up as high as the third one.

I've gotten out of the habit of selling. Spending most of my time researching material I have not yet made displays of and creating those displays. No income, but we're able to make it on Lib's income and my little SS check. Bernd is handling all of the sales, but he isn't sending me any money. He's looking at a couple of collections and is ratholing the sales money to try and buy those.

I think I'm about as organized as I'm going to get. I'm going to take some time off to fish and visit Sis and the three daughters before I get back to my creating displays. Hap and Lib are also giving me lots of things to do for the upcoming wedding - next summer.

## **Inside a Shelter - the best and worst of us...**

The recent tragedy opened the eyes of many in several different areas. Our church, 1st Presbyterian, Lufkin, was one of the many "official" Red Cross shelters. At three o'clock Friday morning we were called and told that evacuees would be arriving in about 15 minutes. Though it was very short notice, our volunteers were well organized. Unfortunately the Red Cross was nothing like as organized. Our volunteers felt like the U.S. troops on Wake Island at the beginning of World War II. The food, water, and ice that was promised did not arrive until several days later. The 150-200 evacuees we were told we would have grew to almost 300 and still no supplies.

Our volunteers took matters into their own hands. They rushed out to Sams and bought several thousand dollars of supplies out of their own pockets. They rented a half dozen port-a-potties and made things happen.

The pharmacy that the Red Cross was supposed to have set up at the Convention Center was not there. Several of our physicians went pharmacies and bought drugs we needed for our evacuees. FEMA did not appear until Sunday, but the two firefighters from Wyoming that they sent for us were excellent. Jeff and Marty were the best of the best and helped make life a lot easier for us. Both are firefighters from Casper, Wyoming and Casper could not have found two better ambassadors for their city, but even they had major problems dealing with and getting information from FEMA. The Lufkin Police Department officers that were assigned to us were also superb.

Many of the evacuees were outstanding - lending help wherever they could. Others had no social graces of any kind. They were unnecessarily demanding and showed more contempt than appreciation for their benefactors.

Danny Strinden built showers for the evacuees while his father, Dr. Bill Strinden treated several. Jim Hannan of Temple brought a sleeping bag and was on site almost 24/7 both coordinating and doing everything from cleaning the mess the evacuees made of the fellowship hall to picking up debris around the property.

Dr. Neal Naranjo got the vital information from each of the evacuees - Social Security Number, Medicare number, list of medications, etc.

On Sunday my wife and I found ourselves among the evacuees at 1st Presbyterian. A huge tree had fallen on our home and TXU told us it was not safe to stay there with the broken power lines all over the home and yard. From being volunteers for a few hours each day we became among the displaced.

There are many lessons to be learned from this experience. In looking at the overall picture, ultimately the bureaucracy did a passable job, but it took far too long for them to get their act together. The Red Cross did not follow their own plan of activating shelters. When problems arose, the Red Cross could not be contacted. Within a few hours our volunteers determined that if anything was going to happen, they were the ones who were going to have to make it happen. We took advantage of the business managers in our church and a chain of command was set up and rules were posted for the evacuees. This did not take days, but rather only an hour or so. From that point on, things ran rather smoothly. We learned the hard way that our local Red Cross is managed by incompetents.

Incredibly, as unpleasant as the accommodations were for most of us, it was a better lifestyle for many than they had before the storm. First Lady Barbara Bush also observed this at the Astro-

dome in Houston. Some evacuees did everything possible to take advantage of their benefactors. Almost anything that was not tied down disappeared - from a new wheel chair to rolls toilet paper. It was a shock to see how some treated their children. While we fared better than some of the other shelters, we suffered some vandalism. Some of the evacuees apparently did not even know how to use a restroom because, believe it or not, they used the floor rather than the toilets. For no reason they scratched the walls with graffiti and obscenities. Our rules of not allowing access to the evacuees to any area except the outside grounds and the fellowship hall limited our damage to those areas. Damage was far greater in many of the shelters that did not limit access.

The evacuees staked out their own little area and pretty much stuck with people they knew. Some of the areas looked like a pig sty, and those people would do nothing to help - even when asked. Interestingly we had two groups of Hispanic extended families among the many. Like the others, they pretty much stuck together (as did our church members who were evacuees). They kept their area spotless and neat. The patriarch assigned duties. Some of the women did their laundry at a nearby laundry mat. Others were responsible of keeping the area neat and clean. Even the youngsters as young as four years old were assigned simple duties between playtime. The teenagers and men did whatever they could around the church and then started getting odd jobs from church members to earn a little money. The patriarch assigned them to the paying jobs and was the one who was paid for their work. Those funds were used for the benefit of their group. The women got together and offered to cook a "real" Mexican dinner for all of the volunteers and evacuees. Most agreed it was one of the best Mexican dinners they had ever eaten.

I personally hired four of the young men at a more than fair wage to clean up around my yard and to empty my huge storage area which was demolished by the fallen tree. I expected it to take 8-10 hours, but they completed it to perfection in 4 1/2 hours. They left my home for another where they removed several trees and did some other work. They added \$400-\$500 to the group's "kitty" that day.

Others, when asked to help or offered a few hours paid work, declined.

In an interesting turn of events, on the 4th day we got a call from 20 Red Cross people who wanted to know if we had room for them. They were not able to get in touch with the local Red Cross bureaucracy. They were staying at the Civic Center and heard our shelter was "better." We told them "of course" and they joined our group. All of a sudden the food, water, diapers, and a lot of other stuff started arriving. One of the Red Cross people cut through the red tape and started raising Cain with the bureaucracy.

Danny Russo's Pentecostal Campground had many, many more people than we had - some 2,000 I understand. Danny, a good friend, is used to handling thousands of people in a short period of time. With the larger numbers came larger problems, but Danny and his people made it work also.

On Friday TXU got our electricity back on and said it was ok to return. Then the electricity went off again and it was back to the shelter. While it was an experience I would not like to experience again, I learned a great deal from the experience. Our pastor taught me a great new card game; I got to know many of our church members a lot better; I learned that Harold Maxwell and his crew are masters at the bar-b-que pit; I learned that Dr. Rick Baggett (our pastor) and Rev. Jackie Hannan (our associate pastor) can work until they look like zombies and have to be forced to take a break to sleep; I learned more about generators from Michael East than I will ever need to know; etc., etc., etc.

I cannot begin to say how pleased I was to see how our people performed - not because of the bureaucracy but rather in spite of the bureaucracy. The citizens of Lufkin are due a big "hurrah" for the efforts they put forth. It is a real shame that some of the evacuees did not appreciate the effort.

Individual members of our church spent literally thousands of dollars of their own money and a tremendous number of hours of their time to provide what was necessary for the evacuees. All of the out-of-pocket money that was spent could have been claimed by First Presbyterian from FEMA and ultimately that would have been reimbursed. But, when the Rev. Dr. Baggett asked for members to turn in the receipts of what they had spent, he did not get a single receipt. Not only were no receipts turned in, but two different member families told Dr. Baggett that they did not want our Church to file a claim with FEMA but rather each volunteered to absorb all of our Church's costs.



This is what we woke up to.



A branch came through the roof of my home office and a little punched through the ceiling. A lot of water came through that little hole.



We covered as much as we could with tarps.



My shop and storage area was in shambles. The structure is totally destroyed but most contents were saved.



A large branch came through the front part of the shop/storage area.



Another view of the tree.



Happy stands by tree to give an idea of its size.



As seen from my neighbor's back yard.



I got some help in emptying the shop and storage area.



Picture of it after it is almost emptied.



Clearing the power lines.



Cutting the tree in pieces.



The top of the tree weighed 3,800 pounds.



This piece of the tree weighed 6,000 pounds



The 30-ton crane. It cost \$913.60 to rent it.



Closeup of tree



Our power pole was also broken. That pole had the electric transformer, telephone lines and cable lines. One of the hot wires was laying in our back yard and another on the roof of our home. Before TXU came out, the pole fell over our home.



8" limb that came through shop/storage area



Our church was one of the official Red Cross shelters. At one time or another we had as many as 300 evacuees in the church.



It was over 3 days before FEMA or Red Cross got us any supplies. Members of the church went out and bought whatever was necessary out of their own pockets.

Putting together packets of stuff for the evacuees.



Washing and folding towels, sheets, etc.

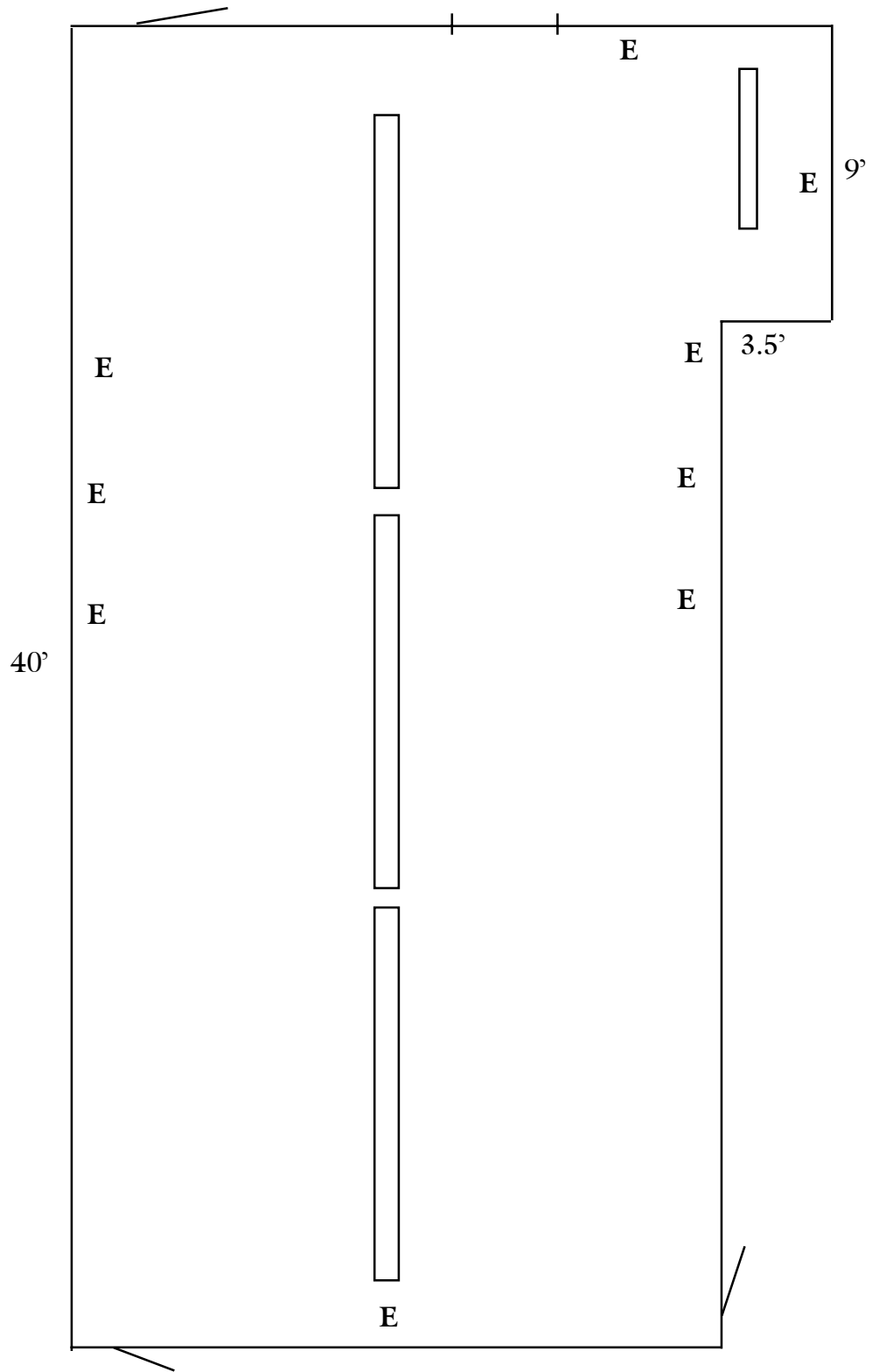
Things have started to happen. We finally got our building permit and the contractor is working on rebuilding my storeroom. Hopefully it will be completed by December 18.



Upper left is the view from my office. Upper right is the view looking at my office. Lower left is the ramp leading to my office and lower right is what will be my shipping area.

The next page is the layout of the new storeroom.

Cy



E=4-way electric plugs

The strips are 6' light fixtures

The 9'x3.5' offset is shipping area

There is a door and window to my office

There is a door on the side leading into Libby's home office

There is a door at the back to give access to the back yard

The roof will be white corrugated metal with one 6' panel of clear fiberglass corrugated roofing

Later I am going to have an air condition duct run into the storeroom from my office. I have a 5-ton air conditioning unit that services only my office and Libby's office, so there will be no problem.