

An aerial satellite-style photograph of a large hurricane with a distinct eye and spiral cloud bands over a dark blue ocean.

08.29.05

THE DAY HURRICANE KATRINA MADE LANDFALL ALONG THE GULF COAST

The Story

The project, 08.29.05, was designed as a means of capturing the attention of people across the nation through the personal stories of survivors of hurricanes throughout recent history.

The project most notably uses its namesake, the date of Hurricane Katrina, as the gateway for opening a broader discussion on the impact hurricanes have on Americans, both directly and indirectly, and what we can do to prevent such great loss in the future.

In 1957, Hurricane Audrey slammed ashore in Cameron, Louisiana and within 24 hours over 500 people were dead, communities swept away and an entire region was left to mourn in the wake of the natural disaster. There were no advanced warning systems, no emergency evacuation plans and no satellite tracking system to predict when and where the hurricane was going to strike.

Almost 50 years later, Hurricane Katrina approaches the Gulf Coast. This time, weather science is highly advanced, evacuation plans are in place and satellites track the storm with precision. Residents in the path of the hurricane feel confident in their preparation. They are ready. But are they? Katrina strikes with devastating force. Long-neglected levees burst, hundreds of thousands of people are isolated and abandoned, governments fail to act, lives are washed away, and chaos unfolds across television screens worldwide. The entire Gulf region is devastated. Less than a month later, Hurricane Rita bursts ashore and the region absorbs still another crushing blow.

“...we will recover, we will never forget, we will never let these failures happen again.”

In 2012, Hurricane Sandy makes landfall in the Northeast region of the United States with New York and New Jersey taking on the brunt force of the storm. In a region that does not typically get powerful hurricanes, residents prepared the best way they knew how, but were not fully aware of the wrath that Sandy had in store for them. Hurricane Sandy quickly becomes the second costliest hurricane to hit the United States and results in 117 American lives lost.

How could these devastating natural disasters happen in present day? What should we have done to be better prepared? How can we make sure these great losses of life do not happen in the future?

This project explores the stubborn resolve that has emerged among the survivors: we will recover, we will never forget, we will never let these failures happen again.

The Purpose

This project is intended to look at modern day hurricanes and how they impact American lives physically, emotionally, economically and environmentally.

Hurricane Katrina was one of the deadliest and costliest natural disasters to affect the United States. Over 1,800 lives were lost and damages are said to cost upwards of \$100 billion. Though it was one of the worst storms, Katrina is just one example of hurricanes that continue to pound the coastlines of the United States year after year.

“It is only in education and rebuilding efforts that we can prevent these great losses of life and belongings.”

When hurricanes enter the Gulf of Mexico, an area rich in seafood and offshore drilling, it leads to a dramatic impact on those industries. Hurricanes disrupt the production of natural gas on offshore wells, leading to a decrease in supply and an increase in prices. As for seafood, the year following Katrina alone, the seafood industry took an estimated \$1.6 billion dollar loss. Not only does this lead to personal loss for those fishermen, but also to an increase in seafood prices across the nation.

Furthermore, the wetlands take a huge loss when major storms pass over them. Wetlands provide a great natural barrier against storm surge, but this also means they are a very hard hit area. The loss of land from Katrina and Rita is estimated at 73 square miles. Unfortunately, due to other factors, it is becoming increasingly difficult to rebuild these natural barriers after major storms devastate them. Louisiana alone loses about 25 to 35 square miles of land a year, which is about a football field size of land every hour. It is for this reason that education on the protection of wetlands is growing ever more necessary.

Whether directly or indirectly affected, the need for an increase in awareness about hurricanes is crucial for future planning and preparation. It is only in education and rebuilding efforts that we can prevent these great losses of life and belongings.

Major organizations, such as the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and the National Hurricane Museum and Science Center (NHMSC), are making strides to improve communication efforts and through this project, I hope to help in that effort.

The Design

I wanted to create a website that was focused on stories. I believe that if someone feels personally connected to a topic, the more they desire to learn about it and become involved.

“...if someone feels personally connected to a topic, the more they desire to learn about it...”

Therefore, you will notice that the website, built using Weebly, has three main sections centered on stories: “My Story,” “Your Story,” and “Survivor Stories.” The only page that will house hard statistics and information is the last page entitled, “The Facts.”

Since not everyone who encounters this website will have direct experience with hurricanes, I thought it was vital to have an interactive fiction where users could become enveloped in the story of Hurricane Katrina. As a result, I chose to focus on the “Your Story” portion of the website that introduces the interactive fiction.

The interactive fiction, created using Twine, was originally going to include games. However, I now believe that it is more effective without them. I wanted the story to be enjoyable, but keep an overall serious tone because it is covering a topic that involves great physical and emotional loss. I thought including games would only detract from that.

I intertwined a couple educational facts in the story, but wanted to leave the bulk of that for “The Facts” page. That page will eventually include statistical data, charts and an interactive map. If I do end up creating a game or two, I would design them for the various sections on “The Facts” page. This would work well to keep the information interactive and not stagnant.

Aside from “The Facts” page, the only portion of the site that is still incomplete is the “Survivor Stories.” For this, I plan to gather or make more videos that tell the tales of survivors of various hurricanes throughout recent history.

The Reach

One major aspect that made me decide to create a hurricane-based digital story was the potential for it to be used by an already established organization. This would allow it to be seen on a much larger platform than my online portfolio can provide at the moment.

That being said, once I complete the website, I would like to offer it to my former boss who works with the National Hurricane Museum and



Science Center. It is my hope that they will be able to use my finished project in connection with the NHMSC website or promote it through their social media outlets.

Moreover, a lot of learning today happens online. The Internet is a wonderful tool. This project will be a great resource for those who want to learn more about hurricanes before NHMSC is open and for those who do not have the opportunity to travel to Lake Charles, LA, to visit the center.

Though only a portion of this project is completed, my ultimate goal is to have the rest finished by the 10th anniversary of Hurricane Katrina: August 29, 2015.

Resources

<http://www.history.com/topics/hurricane-katrina>
<http://www.cnn.com/2013/07/13/world/americas/hurricane-sandy-fast-facts/>
http://www.nytimes.com/2005/09/08/national/nationalspecial/08cnd-fisheries.html?_r=1&
http://www.eia.gov/oog/special/eia1_katrina.html
<http://www.hurricanescience.org/society/impacts/environmentalimpacts/>
http://www.restoreorretreat.org/la_erosion_facts.php
<http://www.ushmm.org>
<http://www.nhmsc.com>
<http://www.creativecommons.org>

Software

<http://www.weebly.com>
<http://www.twinery.org>
<http://www.philome.la>

Tutorials

<http://www.twinery.org/wiki/>
<http://www.auntiepixelante.com/twine/>