

LOVE, AND DEATH, IN THE RUINS

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**"When I had journeyed half our life's way,
I found myself within a shadowed forest,
for I had lost the path that does not stray.
Ah, it is hard to speak of what it was,
That savage forest, dense, and difficult,
Which even in recall renews my fear
So bitter-death is hardly more severe!
But to retell the good discovered there,
I'll also tell the other things I saw."**

**Dante Alighieri
Inferno**

I was attending a physician leader retreat for staff members of Ochsner Clinic Foundation Hospital on Friday and Saturday (August 25-26) at the Ritz-Carleton. Saturday morning it was announced that the retreat would be cut short because a hurricane named Katrina that none of us had taken any notice of, appeared to be headed our way. We contracted our schedule and finished our business by noon. Many of the doctors headed to the lobby to make calls to begin to alert and prepare family members. As I was checking out, I had the intrusive thought that if for any reason my family and/or I have to ride this storm out, the Ritz-Carleton building, being an old, large, predominately concrete structure on Canal Street would be as safe as any. I decided at that time, basically on a protective instinct, to make a new reservation at the hotel for the next day. I suppose I had the "luxury" of foreknowledge, as I am originally from New Orleans and saw Betsy and Camille hit the city, and, in addition, up until a few weeks prior, had been in private practice in Wilmington, NC for 7 years, and was affected by at least 6 hurricanes including Floyd.

Of course, the most immediate issue for my family and I was that we had literally moved into our house a mere 2 weeks ago, and were still in boxes, much less in any sort of state of hurricane preparedness. We were very lucky indeed that my parents, who are from Jackson MS, were visiting that weekend. When I got home from the Ritz on Saturday, it didn't take long for us to listen to the news reports and realize that at the very least I needed to get the family out ASAP. So my parents, my wife, and my children hurriedly packed what they could find, loaded up the dogs and got on the road. I told them that I needed to stay behind to, at the very least, take some protective measures for the home, and I knew that I had a relatively safe place to check in, ride out the storm, and then join the medical team that I figured would be in place if it turned out to be a bad storm.

Saturday night, New Orleans was as close to a ghost town as it ever will be, which is never complete because there are those who will haunt the city despite any impending disaster. I suppose I was one of them. I had an overwhelming intuition that what was about to hit this city, that had been my home and the home of 4 of my previous generations, would probably erase her from the map forever. After pondering how to spend my "last night on Earth", I decided the only place to be was Snug Harbor – the definitive home and perhaps cradle of jazz in New Orleans. Snug Harbor is a quintessential small intimate club on Frenchman Street, and I was joined by about 6 other lonely souls who were having their New Orleans lives pass before their eyes. The performer that evening was a lovely, archetypical chanteuse named Germain Bazzle. Germain did two sets for us, and perhaps she knew what we knew, that this may be the last time she could sing her songs not just to us, but to the city – a city which in itself has a distinctive feminine character, which allows us to love her as you can only love a woman. She took us through our final night, like a farewell church service, and I will never forget her for that, and I hope she survived the storm, so I can thank her for what she did for our little congregation. I took a long lonely walk home through the Quarter, wondering if it would be the last time I would see it – would it look like Dresden after the infamous night bombing in February, 1945. Would I awake and see what Noah saw after 40 days of rain. How many of us would live, and if we lived, would what we

all have that which made us so unique as a culture simply drown, and we would all be remembered as some lost culture of Atlantis composed of artists, misfits, and most of all people who knew what living the gift and joy of life of was every day. It was a long dark drive home...

Sunday, I did the best I could to try and secure the house with the help of my neighbor that I met that morning - he introduced himself as Mr. Felix. Mr. Felix looked to be about 80, and when I asked if he was going to evacuate, he said "hell no - I lived in this house all my life - I saw Betsy and Camille and we got no water, no water at all". He reminded me of my grandfather in his spit in your face resiliency. He was about 5'6", weighed maybe 120 pounds, had a big nose and even bigger ears, and a bad case of vitiligo, so he sort of looked like an old mean leopard that you didn't want to mess with too much. Still in my state of pre-mourning for the city, I remembered that this city was built by a bunch of tenacious, "fuck you - I'll do it my way, right here and no where else" type of men, and that the last of these great bastards was also about to be swallowed up by the swamp water. I was glad one just like him had given me at least some of his DNA to take with me into whatever world was waiting for us after the apocalypse. Mr. Felix lent me nails to nail up my shutters. Then, when his ladder was just a bit too wobbly, he finally allowed me to help him nail scraps of plywood to his. I asked him one more time if he wanted to come with me, but, predictably, he was unmovable. I gave him my cell phone number and told him to call me if he changed his mind.

I threw as many of my valuable papers and some clothes in the car and headed for the Ritz. Checking in was just as if I were checking in for any other visit. In fact, I should go ahead and go on record here that from start to finish; the Ritz Carleton employees managed an unimaginable natural disaster with nothing short of style and grace. Every single employee seemed absolutely unflappable and accommodating, providing a great sense of comfort to the guests. They even passed out little individual flashlights to each of the guests (a tool that I held on to for 11 days and got me out of a number of binds). Indeed the majority of the "guests" were family members of the hotel employees from all races, walks of life, and socioeconomic groups - a little microcosm of New Orleans.

Sunday night, I and probably the majority of the hotel guests hunkered down in their rooms, and channel surfed through the various storm coverages. I finally couldn't stand it anymore and switched to the space survival movie "Apollo 13", and fell asleep wondering if I would ever be able to figure out how to survive in a tin can in space.

I awoke at 6:45 AM on Sunday - the time the power went out. I looked out the window and the howling witch Katrina was definitely upon us. I heard my large plate glass straining. I quickly got dressed and moved myself and my luggage into the bathroom, ready for them to blow out. But a calm voice came over the loudspeaker and asked everyone to move to the lower floor ballrooms to ride out the storm. They escorted everyone down the stairs into the ballroom, where they had coffee and croissant stations set up - just like any other conference. They had already started showing movies for the kids.

Oddly most of the Monday of the storm (August 28) was spent milling about the ballroom, watching people, and catching up on some books I had been wanting to read. We were all in a state of sensory deprivation about the storm. We couldn't feel it, couldn't see it, and no one had any news of how bad it was. I met three members of the NOPD, Jeff Jacob, whose family was taking refuge in the hotel, Tommy Redmann, and Doug Butler. Butler was an ex-marine and seemed like he could put up with anything or anyone could dish out - including the storm.

About 4PM the hotel allowed guests to return to their room. Outside the weather had essentially cleared and people were walking about the street looking and taking pictures of the storm damage. I grabbed my camera and walked around the French Quarter, shot a few pictures, and was actually quite amazed at the relatively minor damage in the Quarter - although it was clear that many of the high rise hotels had windows blown out. True to New Orleans form, by 6 PM someone had set up a stand selling cold draft beer for \$1 on Bourbon Street. I briefly thought

about trying to walk home and check if I still had a house, but that would have taken hours, and some of the police I talked to said that some looting had already begun. I decided to sleep one more night at the Ritz. That night was eerie as I remember, as no one had any news, no one was going anywhere, and electricity was being rationed. I hung out in the room of my police friends for a while and helped them clean out their minibar. Some said there was rumor of a levee break and a helicopter crash, but no one was sure. The police had no communications. Around midnight the cop who was an ex-marine, dropped his stoic and tough guard, and literally began to lose his mind. He started screaming that he had to get out of there and do something because he knew his wife and daughter were out there drowning somewhere. He got so agitated that he tried to open the window of the hotel and climb out so he could find them. We calmed him down with more treats from the minibar, and got him to promise if he would keep his shit together mentally, we would go find his wife and daughter as soon as it was daylight. So I went back up to my room and tried to sleep, but the reality that I had just moved my family to a city that may be mostly destroyed and had just bought a house that may not be there anymore kept me awake and staring out the window into a black city for most of the night.

When dawn broke on Tuesday August 30, it was clear that everything was now completely different. I looked out of my window to realize that the hotel was surrounded by 3-5 feet of water, and there was water filling most of Canal Street. There was an overhead announcement that anyone who needed medical care should report to the French Quarter bar. From that time on, I supposed I instinctively knew we were in for a medical crisis of some sort and leaving was simply out of the question. Real soldiers don't run from fighting and real doctors (even pathologists) don't run from sick people. Since I was a physician, I went down to let them know that I was willing to help in any way. Being a pathologist, I was extremely happy to discover that there had been an HIV conference at the hotel, and, as such, there were several infectious disease specialists present, a family practitioner, a pharmacist, a PA, and an Ob/Gyn who happened to be Officer Jacob's father. In addition several of the conference organizers were present to help. I told them I was a pathologist, and was willing to help out and take instruction from any of the primary care docs. Dr. Jacob and I joked together that we hoped that we wouldn't need the benefits of our mutual specialty training. I am afraid I don't remember exactly the names of all of the great team that assembled in the "clinic". The team had already been organizing a list of possible drugs and supplies that we would need. The problem was - I had already looked outside and talked to the police and realized that looting had begun, and many people were armed. I knew we were not going to have the chance to selectively look through the pharmacy and get what we thought we needed. We needed to get in there quickly, get as much as we could, and get out quickly.

The police agreed. So with Ritz-Carleton security at the watch, the young pharmacist and I and the police and I believe the family practice physician (who by the way had a leg brace on secondary to an ankle injury) waded across Canal Street in thigh deep water to the Walgreen's.

With their weapons drawn, Officers Jacob and Redmann and a few others kept the looters out. The front door had already been smashed. We went in with several other police officers. It was dark, full of water, it stunk like shitty sewer water and vomit, and there were items floating everywhere. The pharmacy was locked but we figured out how to smash through a plastic window divider and climb in. After we climbed in, the pharmacist figured out how the shelves were organized and found the refrigerator with some insulin. I tried to start stuffing things in my pockets but realized that was futile. A police officer found some Hefty bags and we were "in business". As fast as we could we started grabbing things off the shelves and filling the bags, trying to keep the bags high and dry. All the while we were yelling to the police in the store what other non-medical items, diapers, Depends, Ensure, bandages to get. Several police kept saying hurry, hurry; we don't have much more time. The pharmacist and the others filled as many bags as possible. I was the last one leaving. Officer Jacob was still guarding the door, and asked me did I get everything I needed. I said there's a lot more back there we could probably use, but they said we don't have time. He said - you got time - go get what you need. It was then that the first of many epiphanies hit me. I turned and looked at the mob in front of the store and caught the eye

of one black guy, about my age, and he said to me – “you’re just going back in there to take everything and leave nothing for us”. In that moment, these “looters” and I became one. I realized that they, the ones without privilege and letters of various degrees dangling off the back of their names had to wait their turn to gather the crumbs that I was leaving, while a brave cop held them all off at gunpoint. They weren’t there for any plasma screen TV’s, and they sure as shit weren’t there for the wet Hallmark cards. They were there for supplies to take care of themselves and their families. We were all looters, and in that moment I became happy to be one. I looked at him and told him I am a doctor, and I just need to get a few more medicines to take care of some sick people. After that, you can have everything else. Maybe it was just my imagination, but at that the crowd seemed to relax. I think Jacob was even able to lower his weapon.

I went back in the pharmacy, and with the help of another officer we filled Hefty bags with all of the special plastic containers that pharmacies use to store their most commonly dispensed drugs. I figured that, as they say common things being common, this was the best stuff to take. So we got all of it, even the bottom shelves that were waterlogged, in hopes we could make some use of it. With that I lugged three bags back across Canal Street praying that the bags wouldn’t break. When I got back on dry land at the Ritz I just dropped all the bags on the parking lot floor and almost collapsed.

I was exhausted and filthy from the water so I went upstairs to change clothes and try and clean off. I realized that I had been in raw sewerage and that it had gotten in my mouth and eyes. I went back down to the “clinic” and found that the pharmacist had already done a damn good job organizing the lot. I found some Cipro, a very broad spectrum antibiotic, and got myself a handful for immediate and future use.

I went back up to my room to finish cleaning off and to start planning for the next step. It was during this time that the hotel announced that there would be some power on for a few hours, which, through the accident of knocking over my phone and realizing I had a coveted dial tone, meant that I could use a dial up connection on the phone to send an e-mail. I sat down and wrote out what had happened over the past 48 hours, sent it to my family and a few of my old practice members. It was that e-mail that ultimately went around the world, on seemingly every blog in the blogosphere, and ultimately helped bring the help that we would so desperately need as the week went on. This is the text of that e-mail:

From: Gregory S. Henderson MD, PhD
Subject: thoughts and prayers

Thanks to all of you who have sent your notes of concern and your prayers. I am writing this note on Tuesday at 2PM . I wanted to update all of you as to the situation here. I don't know how much information you are getting but I am certain it is more than we are getting. Be advised that almost everything I am telling you is from direct observation or rumor from reasonable sources. They are allowing limited internet access, so I hope to send this dispatch today.

Personally, my family and I are fine. My family is safe in Jackson, MS, and I am now a temporary resident of the Ritz Carlton Hotel in New Orleans. I figured if it was my time to go, I wanted to go in a place with a good wine list. In addition, this hotel is in a very old building on Canal Street that could and did sustain little damage. Many of the other hotels sustained significant loss of windows, and we expect that many of the guests may be evacuated here.

Things were obviously bad yesterday, but they are much worse today. Overnight

the water arrived. Now Canal Street (true to its origins) is indeed a canal. The first floor of all downtown buildings is underwater. I have heard that Charity Hospital and Tulane are limited in their ability to care for patients because of water. Ochsner is the only hospital that remains fully functional. However, I spoke with them today and they too are on generator and losing food and water fast. The city now has no clean water, no sewerage system, no electricity, and no real communications. Bodies are still being recovered floating in the floods. We are worried about a cholera epidemic. Even the police are without effective communications. We have a group of armed police here with us at the hotel that are admirably trying to exert some local law enforcement. This is tough because looting is now rampant. Most of it is not malicious looting. These are poor and desperate people with no housing and no medical care and no food or water trying to take care of themselves and their families. Unfortunately, the people are armed and dangerous. We hear gunshots frequently. Most of Canal street is occupied by armed looters who have a low threshold for discharging their weapons. The looters are using makeshift boats made of pieces of styrofoam to access stores. We are still waiting for a significant national guard presence.

The health care situation here has dramatically worsened overnight. Many people in the hotel are elderly and small children. Many other guests have unusual diseases. We have commandeered the world famous French Quarter Bar to turn into a makeshift clinic. There is a team of about 7 doctors and PA and pharmacists. We anticipate that this will be the major medical facility in the central business district and French Quarter.

Our biggest adventure today was raiding the Walgreens on Canal under police escort. The pharmacy was dark and full of water. We basically scooped the entire drug sets into garbage bags and removed them. All under police escort. The looters had to be held back at gun point.

In all we are faring well. We have set up a hospital in the French Quarter bar in the hotel, and will start admitting patients today. We are anticipating dealing with multiple medical problems, medications and acute injuries. Infection and perhaps even cholera are anticipated major problems. Food and water shortages are imminent.

The biggest question to all of us is where is the national guard. We hear jet fighters and helicopters, but no real armed presence, and hence the rampant looting. There is no Red Cross and no salvation army.

In a sort of cliché way, this is an edifying experience. One is rapidly focused away from the transient and material to the bare necessities of life. It has been challenging to me to learn how to be a primary care physician. We are under martial law so return to our homes is impossible. I don't know how long it will be and this is my greatest fear. Despite it all, this is a soul edifying experience. The greatest pain is to think about the loss. And how long the rebuild will take. And

the horror of so many dead people .

PLEASE SEND THIS DISPATCH TO ALL YOU THINK MAY BE INTERSTED IN A DISPATCH From the front. I will send more according to your interest. Hopefully their collective prayers will be answered. By the way suture packs, sterile gloves and stethoscopes will be needed as the Ritz turns into a MASH.

Greg Henderson

As I finished the e-mail and hit the send button, the lights simultaneously went off, so I assumed my plea never got sent.

In the Ritz Carleton clinic, I didn't participate directly in any patient care. This, I was well aware, was way outside of my expertise, especially when we had the luxury of several primary care physicians and ID specialists. I did things like try and organize some sort of rudimentary medical records system, but ultimately the young woman who was the conference organizer proved to be more efficient than I. I remember feeling pretty powerless and helpless to contribute as a pathologist. But for the most part in the 24 hours at the clinic the majority of patients seeking help were seeking prescription refills, some of which were rather esoteric drugs which we didn't have. There was one elderly wheelchair bound lady who had developed an acute deep respiratory cough and wheezing. Later, I heard there were individuals who presented with some type of chest pain. But for the most part, I let the direct care staff know that I was available for any extra help that they needed, and checked in periodically. As long as I had, who I now considered my friends, the police with me I didn't worry much about crime. Coming from New Orleans and having trained at Hopkins I was pretty used to how to handle myself in some tough areas.

The game, of course, for me all changed on the morning of Wednesday, August 31. I had heard the night before from the police that the Ritz had decided to get everyone out of the hotel by noon on a bus to the airport. I told the police that there was no point in my leaving, this was my home and obviously there was going to be a need for medical care. They said fine, that they would all be going across the street to the Sheraton hotel to set up operational headquarters and a command and control center.

First thing in the morning Officers Jacob and Redmann threw my luggage in a high SUV and while I rode on the roof drove through the water to the Sheraton. They introduced me to Captain John Bryson who was the man in charge and we got down to real work.

He told me I was the only doctor he knew of around, that Tulane, LSU and Charity were taking on water and stranded, and that if I wanted to stay he needed me to take care of the several hundred police officers that had set up camp at the Sheraton. I told him I would, and now felt the real chilling fear that it was me and only me who had to run the show. I used every bit of my brain to remember everything I learned thirteen years prior as a medical student in the Vanderbilt ER during my 3 month trauma rotation and prayed it would come back when I needed it.

I told Bryson that the first thing we needed to do was get to another pharmacy and get bandages, general medical supplies and medications. He said he had heard of another Walgreen's in the Quarter that hadn't been completely looted. He immediately dispatched me with a team of armed officers to raid that pharmacy, which was in the same state as the previous; however, we didn't have to fight looters. Having done it once, I was now pretty efficient in the art of pharmacy raiding. As such, we were able to get the majority of medical supplies we needed – including some insulin that was still cold.

When we returned the hotel management welcomed me with open arms, gave me a room key,

told me that they would find anything I needed, and said that I could set up a clinic and pharmacy in the lobby of the hotel. I spent the next several hours with some help from some of the police force organizing the medications, first alphabetically, and then subdividing them by class – a real challenge to remember my days of pharmacology from long ago. In the course of sorting I realized we had collected a number of controlled substances which really concerned me in terms of if we got raided by looters or just the general liability of having them around. Unless we had a serious trauma, I figured we wouldn't need most of them, so with the help of hotel management I found a locked place to store all of them.

By evening we were ready for business. Bryson announced to all of the force that we had a doctor and a clinic now in the lobby, and to please see me with any medical problems.

Immediately I was transformed from sub specialist in pathology to family practice/internal medicine/psychiatrist/ and ER doc all at once.

I saw everything from generalized anxiety disorders (not unexpected as most of the police had lost homes and some had lost family members and yet still were on the job). I dealt with quite a bit of hypertension and diabetes. I remember thinking it seems like the majority of the NOPD is hypertensive and type II diabetic. I took a lot of blood pressures, listened to a lot of hearts, and refilled a lot of beta-blocker, calcium channel blocker and diuretic prescriptions. I cleaned and dressed a lot of superficial wounds. I gave a lot of insulin shots – but stupidly I had forgotten to take any rubbing alcohol, so I had to use Wild Turkey to sterilize skin sites before all my injections – it seemed to work well. And I gave out Cipro – a lot of Cipro.

During the first night of clinic was when I first heard the stories that all hell was breaking loose at the convention center. By report people had been told to go there when the water got high, and they were arriving in the night and many were armed. The police were telling me stories of rapes and murders, but that at this point, given the absence of communications, they were essentially unable to do anything about it except maintain some sort of perimeter around it so it didn't begin to engulf the whole city.

Clinic lasted all night – it took that long to get all the histories and physicals done and organize my clinic. I ran another morning clinic for the police officers coming off of evening duty, this time dealing with more superficial minor lacerations, and what seemed to be increasingly common rashes in those exposed to the water. Some of the rashes became so severe that some of the cops had to walk around in their underwear because it was so painful. It appeared to be some severe contact dermatitis from exposure to toxins in the water. Most of them continued to tell the same tales of what was happening at the Convention Center. I knew it was only a matter of time before I was going to have to stitch a wound or perhaps deal with some major trauma. As it was now September 1, and if it was my formal first day as a staff member of Ochsner Clinic Foundation, I called Dr. Joe Guarisco, the chairman of the ED at Ochsner and told him about my predicament. He told me if I could get to Ochsner he would set me up with what I needed. Captain Bryson drove me to Ochsner, and on the way made a quick detour for me to look at any damage to my house. Miraculously there was very little damage and no flood water. When I saw this, it became the ultimate jolt of adrenaline to now focus on so many that had not been as lucky as I had. I banged on Mr. Felix's door. After a few minutes he answered me standing in his baggy jeans and an undershirt. I told him about everything that I knew that had happened and asked him if he wanted to come to the Sheraton with me. He laughed in my face and said "hell no – I'm stayin' right here" and promptly slammed the door in my face.

At Ochsner, Dr. Guarisco had a pack ready with scrubs, sterile suture kits and other miscellaneous items he thought I would need, along with a PDR and 2 textbooks of emergency medicine. He and all the staff were saturated with taking care of the patients showing up at Ochsner and already in the hospital, so they could spare no help. I remember Joe asking me if I was sure I really wanted to do this. I told him that if he had seen what I had seen he would understand that I had to go help – he understood what I meant. He wished me luck, gave me his

cell phone number to call and he could talk me through any patient problem I might encounter – hopefully.

When Bryson and I headed back to Canal Street, I asked him to go by the Convention Center. He said – “Are you sure?” I told him we needed to check it out. As we drove by, there is no image that I have ever witnessed in the United States that I had ever seen to which I could compare it. We went from First World to Third World overnight. Thousands upon thousands of people were collected on the boulevard in front of the convention center. There were the infants to the elderly and in wheelchairs. There were many elderly lying on sheets and blankets on the median (or neutral ground as we call it here in New Orleans). There were screaming men, women and children and dazed quiet and confused men, women and children. Most were African-American, but many were white. It was as if the entire city had vomited up its citizens and the convention center was the vomit trough. People saw me dressed in green scrubs and started banging on the windows saying “help us doc” – many were in tears. I wanted to get out of the vehicle and help these people, but Bryson was minimally armed. He wouldn’t let me get out, but promised that as soon as we got back to the Sheraton he would send me back with enough armed police escort to start trying to do something for these people.

He kept his promise, and he sent me out with Officer Mark Mornay – one of the finest and bravest men I have ever had the pleasure to know in my life. When Mornay took me back to the Convention Center and saw what I saw – he too took it as his personal mission to help these people in any and every way he could. We found quickly that a physician in scrubs with a stethoscope with a kind but forceful police officer were immediately welcomed into the crowd. The problem was how to deal with all the people – estimates are that by then there were 15,000 people there – I later found out that the number was closer to 30,000. As soon as I would briefly hear one person’s crisis, I was grabbed for another – there was simply no way to logically triage it all. I ended up spending most of the afternoon with Mornay just making my way through the crowd dealing with one person after another. Lots of dehydrated infants and mothers – all I could do was get them water bottles, tell them to get out of the hundred degree sun and keep drinking. Hundreds of elderly confined to wheelchairs – also dehydrated, many with large plastic bags of empty medication bottles asking for refills (of which I had none). One elderly, obese, diabetic wheelchair bound woman, who I remember so well told me that she thought she had something wrong with her legs. I lifted her long housecoat to reveal multiple bilateral deep epidermal ulcerations on her tibia and feet, and a few gangrenous toes. I told her that I couldn’t do anything for her right now but I would get help as fast as I could. She said “that’s ok honey, I’m old, they don’t hurt that bad, and there are some sick babies here – you go worry about them.” And worry I did. I saw three children in active seizures, two of whom had a known seizure disorder and had run out of medication. There wasn’t much I could do for them except wait for the seizure to subside and make sure that they were not physically harmed in any way. The third child appeared to be in a combination of seizure and severe asthma attack complete with severe intercostals retractions. The parents had no medications, they had found a bag of IV fluids from God knows where, and had cut a hole in it and tried to give it to him by mouth. I kneeled down to listen to his chest - severe bilateral wheezing. The kid who was about the age of my daughter looked panicked, and all I knew to do was to grab him, sit him in my lap, and look in his eyes and say “watch me breathe, breath like I breathe” and to take long slow deep breaths. After about 5 minutes of complete eye contact he got the rhythm with me and slowly his breathing got more measured, controlled and deep. After about 20 minutes he appeared OK, I listened to his chest – wheezy, but not as bad, and told him I had to move on.

I could go on and on as I dig deeper and deeper into my memory over that first day at the convention center but the stories would be ceaseless and essentially until evacuation began 48 hours later, this was how I practiced. Officer Mornay soon picked up the rudiments of what I was doing and just emulated me. It wasn’t complicated after all, because we had no real treatment to administer. There were those who had already died. Most were neatly wrapped by family members or their neighbors in the crowd and brought inside and up to the second floor of the center. Some however, like a person who had died in his wheelchair, was rolled into the shade

and covered with a blanket. I saw every manifestation of both acute, but mainly chronic untreated disease that a physician can see, and realized in stark cold reality just how much we are a nation of chronic disease, and when people don't have their meds, and there are no doctors to give them – all hell rapidly broke loose. I saw thousands of diabetics, all of whom had no insulin or oral hypoglycemics and had not been dialyzed for days, and were clearly not being hydrated. I saw the seizure disorders in children. I saw the thousands upon thousands of hypertensive patients – essentially all of whom did not have their medicines and were thus at risk for rebound malignant hypertension. I saw heroin addicts looking for the methadone clinic. And in the most devastating and haunting memory of all, I saw rows and rows of people from the children to the elderly who were wheelchair bound, because of cerebral palsy, severe congenital defects, amputation, and strokes lined up in rows, many sitting in their adult diapers for days, because there were simply no fresh diapers to change them.

Needless to say by the end of my first day at the convention center on Thursday evening, I was starting to lose a bit of hope. But even as the situation was getting more desperate, hope began to rise. As I moved through the crowd late Thursday I started getting cell phone calls (the cell phone miraculously started working) from people wanting to help. In particular, a large multispecialty group, Wilmington Health Associates (WHA), had, under the direction of an old friend Dr. Al DeMaria had apparently gotten my e-mail call for help. He along with his wife Kitty and other physicians and staff at WHA, and local citizens, Cathy Maready, Melissa Davis, and Kathy Gresham had collected supplies and contacted a large local pharmaceutical CRO firm called PPD to help get me the supplies. The next call was from Nancy Zeleniak of PPD who told me the CEO and founder of PPD, Dr. Fred Eshelman had filled the corporate jet with all of the supplies and they were flying to Baton Rouge to be loaded onto school buses. She told me my "lost e-mail" had been around the world 3 times and was on blogs in most countries. They expected delivery Saturday morning. "Two days" I thought, "just hang on, keep as many people alive as you can for two days and try not to get killed and help will be on the way". Almost simultaneously I got a call from Mr. Bill Essig and Dr. Dan Diamond of Northwest Medical Teams International from Oregon. They are a humanitarian medical relief team that said that they had already left and were on their way to help – again having gotten my widely dispersed e-mail. They thought they could make it by Sunday, but were going to need escort into the city and a site to be identified to set up a civilian mobile hospital.

Now I had hope and a plan – the two most important ingredients necessary for crisis management.

After that first day at the convention center, Sept 1, Mornay told me he couldn't be responsible for taking care of me after dark, so we reluctantly went back to the Sheraton, to start all night medicine clinic again. After treating God – knows how many more officers and support staff and hotel employees, I laid down for an hour to catch the first sleep I had had since Sunday. After about an hour on a couch next to my bar/pharmacy, around 4:30 on Sept. 2, we were all awakened by a massive explosion the shock of which blew me right off the couch. I ran to the window and saw a tremendous mushroom cloud of flame coming from the direction of the river beyond the French Quarter. We were all dumbfounded, and, as usual, had no information. We were all standing outside on Canal Street waiting to figure out what had happened when 2 large SUVs raced down the street telling everyone it was a toxic gas explosion and to get the hell out of there. By then, an acrid smell was hitting all of our noses. I went back in the hotel, sat down and thought about what to do and realized that there was probably no way out of this one. It was the one time when I was sure I was going to die. I used the recently acquired luxury of a working cell phone to make what I thought was my last call home. I told my wife I loved her. We decided not to wake the girls, but I made her promise to try and explain to them why I had done what I had done, to teach them to be brave always, and also to promise me that she would raise them in such a way that they would do the same thing as their Dad did – without hesitation. I talked to my mom who was quietly hysterical with grief and then my Dad. Dad, being the most rational – I asked him for any advice on how not to die from toxic gas. He said I might want to get as high in the hotel as possible, and that he would check the news channels for what had really

happened. I hung up, told everyone that I saw of my Dad's advice and started climbing stairs.

A painfully long hour later, in which I alternated between practicing how long I could hold my breath and remembering from my medical training what it was like to die from toxic inhalation, my father called back and told me a train car had exploded and it was believed to not be toxic gas. I made my way back to Canal Street where a number of police officers confirmed this story. It appeared that, fortunately, I would die another day. Mornay and I suited up for the day and went back to the Convention Center to do it all again. We would start at Hall A and make our way through the crowd all the way to the other end of the miserably long building, and then turn around and head back. With each lap, we helped who we could, comforted who we couldn't, and gave a message of hope that help was on its way. Like a ridiculous caricature of Jesus, dressed in green and with my single disciple named Mark, I tried to heal and spread a gospel of rescue in the middle of the mouth of hell itself. Jesus did a lot better job than I did. I did, however, re-learn the power you are blessed with, when you are given the title of Doctor - that power in which the mere touching or "laying on of hands" as they called it in the old days, in and of itself could heal and comfort. Some people just wanted to come up and have me hug them while they cried on me, cried like souls begging to get out of hell and hoping I was the one that would free them. But I was condemned to it with them. Looking back over those long 2 days I have thought over and over about what I could have done differently. Could I have gotten a bullhorn and addressed the crowd to try and triage themselves – and if they had what would I have done then? "What if, what if, what if" will plague my dreams and my thousand mile stares for a long time to come.

The greatest horror the people faced was the now raging fire of rumor that had become for everyone reality, that rampant murder and rape was going on all around at the Convention Center. Even though I saw nothing to indicate this, it too became the reality that I operated under. According to the people, during the days, I suppose it was the "best of times", but at night, just as in a Stephen King novel - the real horror would begin. As most of the people were outside the center, because the inside was much hotter than the outside because it is built like a giant greenhouse, the evil element had taken refuge inside the bowels of the center. It was at night, when the police could no longer take the chance to defend the crowd with such small numbers, that the predatory animals came out to feed on the victims outside. The story told to me by the people is that they would identify a woman or girls that they would want to rape, start firing their weapons to cause crowd hysteria and grab the woman and bring her inside for the assault. I heard one woman had been raped and her throat cut afterwards, another 6 year old had been raped and had died from the trauma. Another sketchy report was of a young mother who placed her infant inside of a refrigerator to keep it cool, and it suffocated. I am telling you all of this – whether it really happened or not – that it was our reality at the time and that reality was that indeed the mouth of hell that had opened, and the good, the bad and the ugly were being slowly devoured by it.

As we made our last walk along the convention center Friday night September 2, I was stunned, amazed and in total disbelief to find that a full military MASH unit had landed and had begun breaking out its equipment to care for patients. I hugged every last one of them, somewhat hysterically I'm afraid, and asked them what was happening. The head of operations – her name was Connie, said that they had received orders to deploy here and prepare to triage patients and evacuate as many as possible by helicopter beginning in the morning. I told her there were 15,000 – 20,000 people out there, many of them can't walk and some are near death. She said don't worry – we're here to help and we will get the job done. I told them I had medical and civilian supplies arriving by bus from Baton Rouge in the morning. She said she didn't think they would need them but get them here and maybe we could put them to use.

As Mornay and I made our way back to Canal street we put the word out that the military was here, we were setting up a hospital and we would start evacuation tomorrow – please keep calm for one more night and we will get you out of here. Many cried when they heard this, many thought I was lying.

But as predictably as a French train, at 9AM on Saturday, September 3 – EVACUATION DAY – school buses packed to the brim with every medical supply you could want – including the much coveted insulin on ice arrived courtesy of the medical community and people of Wilmington, North Carolina. As we were driving to the evacuation site, I found out additional details about how this effort was put together. My former colleague, Dr Michael Moulton, ER physician at New Hanover Regional in Wilmington, NC, had been contacted to gain advice on obtaining medical staff for the MASH. Dr Moulton, a board member of the NC Medical Society, brought in Dr Bob Seligson, CEO for the Society. Dr Seligson contacted Paul Jones in the office of the soon-to-be chief medical officer for National Homeland Security, who actually was not to start his job until 6 Sept., and the team tapped into Paul for additional insight. Once Dr. Eshelman got the supplies to Baton Rouge, Louisiana State Senator Rob Marionneaux was the driving force to get them to New Orleans – arranging police escorts. The bus drivers, Beth Carbo and Michele Drevecky drove valiantly into a hell they could not have imagined.

As we pulled into the MASH unit, we were joined by another 18 wheel truck from another humanitarian group in Texas that had gotten my e-mail, and had packed as many supplies as they could and sent them my way. At the MASH they had already begun to run out of supplies by 10 AM, and they were in desperate need of the insulin we had. The military team scoured all three of our vehicles taking what they needed and leaving the rest for us to distribute as civilian medical supplies throughout the crowd. Helicopters of all shape and rotor number landed every few minutes. Those that could immediately be boarded were. Those that needed medical stabilization were taken care of by the skilled MASH unit and then evacuated.

Mornay had the great idea of equally setting up distribution stations for the civilian supplies along the length of the crowd waiting to get on helicopters and buses. He and several officers along with some National Guard members successfully and orderly did this providing essentials such as diapers, Pedialyte, food, sterile cleaning clothes, etc at regular stations. I am certain that this made that long, hot and hellish day when people were literally fainting and dropping in the lines just a little bit better.

With the school buses empty we decided to use them to patrol the crowd and load patients on the bus who were clearly unable to walk or move or were wheelchair bound. This helped the most severely ill of the patients get out earlier.

Another miraculous arrival on Saturday was the appearance of Dr. Juliet Saussy, an ER physician and director of New Orleans Emergency Medical Services. She and the majority of her staff had been stranded by the flooding in New Orleans East, and had to spend the next 3 days wading and boating through flood water to get back in the city. They arrived just like the cavalry on the morning of evacuation and were absolutely indispensable despite their ordeal and lack of sleep.

Again like so much of the entire experience, many specifics and times have become the victim of sleep deprivation, stress, and lack of food. But the single most profound personal experience of the Katrina hell, and the victory over the hell happened to me mid-afternoon on Saturday. Somehow, of course I don't remember how, by that afternoon we had lost the use of the busses for the movement of the wheelchair bound and non-ambulatory to the head of the mile-long line to get on the helicopters, and quite frankly, I and many other people who were moved by the crisis were physically wheeling or helping them walk – one by one to the helicopters. I remember the heat and the noise of the helicopter engines so vividly. I came upon a man about my age, early 40's, who had severe cerebral palsy. He had been sitting in his wheelchair for days, in his same adult diaper, he couldn't talk, he had, of course difficulty moving or really effectively communicating what he needed – probably not as a result of any mental deficit, but as a result of his severe physical handicap coupled with dehydration, and just pure misery. And everything he had besides the clothes on his back, filled half of a small black Hefty bag that he kept closely guarded. I asked him his name which he couldn't answer; he shook his head when I asked if he had any ID, and again when I asked if he had any friends or family here. He had arm crutches

which seem to indicate that he had some ability to walk if escorted, but because of his extremely physically bad state and weakness that was clearly not an option. I made sure he understood me when I talked with him, and I told him I needed to get something that would be easier to get him moved to the helicopter rather than the wheelchair, which seemed to be broken. I wandered around a bit and found one of those brass luggage carts that hotel valets use to unload your luggage out of your car when you check in. I helped him onto the cart, which was easier, because it was lower. As I picked him up and put him on the cart, he looked at me embarrassed because he knew how bad he smelled having been in the same diaper for days. I understood what he was embarrassed about, so I used my standard line that I was a pathologist and nothing repulsed me – I think he either grimaced or smiled. I got him loaded on the cart with his crutches and the hefty bag. When we got to the head of the line, I had acquired enough clout with the military team to get him through the checkpoint without a firearm or alcohol check. The luggage cart was one of those marginally good ideas because it didn't obey my directions well, like a shopping cart with a broken wheel. But I was able to get him to the loading bay of this really large jet helicopter (sorry I don't know what kind – not up on my helicopters). When the time came to get him up out of the luggage cart and get his crutches on, so he could balance his body weight between them and me, and we made our way up the double gangplank his crutches kept slipping off, and all the time the hot as hell damn jet exhaust was blasting in our faces. Finally, I basically said "fuck it" and picked him up crutches, bag and all and carried him in the helicopter, sat him down and got him strapped in. And then it happened – this man, this man who God had sent into this world with one thousandth of the blessings that I was sent into the world with, this man who got sent into the world with so little, and such a heavy physical limitation to maneuver every day, and after all of it – the sum total of his worldly acquisitions could fit in half of a tattered Hefty bag. This man, who I had no idea if he had any family, any friends, or any one who loved him (all things that I was most well endowed with) – This man of so little put his arms around me and gave me the only gift he could give – a kiss on the cheek. I thanked him, told him I didn't deserve what he had given me, but I am not sure he heard me, and just as quickly the military staff rushed me off the helicopter.

The experience at the time it happened clearly affected me, but I was so immediately pulled into the next crisis that I didn't have time to dwell on how deeply it was to move me and has begun to take on a symbolism of its own. That nameless man is Katrina for me, although the tragedy affected so many in so many ways the entire universe of the tragedy for me is incarnated in him. When I think of him, which is basically every day – I think of what the poet William Blake said "To see the world in a grain of sand, and Heaven in a wild flower; Hold infinity in the palm of your hand, and eternity in an hour." That was what my nameless friend, who gave the last of what he had to me, and in that act made that poetry a living experience. It is his story that I will let drive me every day. I lay awake at night a lot, and I get the thousand mile stare at work a lot – wondering where the helicopter took him, who met him, who is taking care of him now, does he have family, is he still alive, would God please give him the gift of knowing real love - for God's sakes can I even know his name?

Amazingly, by sundown the vast majority of the people had been evacuated. In fact I took a last drive through the entire area on an electric cart that I found with a young EMT and Tulane Medical Student, Drina Freitas, to search for stragglers. The few we found refused to leave, and after that I headed back to the Sheraton as night fell. We came upon one bundle of blankets that looked like it was a wrapped body, but when we both unwrapped it, it fortunately was just pillows.

By then the Sheraton Command and Control Center had set up a station of 4 computers with internet access so that people could get information and e-mail their homes. About 8 that night the last thing I remember was logging on to my account. I woke up probably an hour later to find that I had collapsed at the computer screen, and the police officers had brought me to a cot, found Dr. Saussy, who had already started an IV on me. I will never, as long as I live forget her smiling at me saying I was OK as I regained consciousness. Apparently, I had failed to take my own advice and had become completely dehydrated and hypoglycemic through the heat of the day, and my body finally gave up. Captain Bryson and several of his men personally drove me to

Ochsner where I met the chief of staff, Dr. Bobby Rodwig, my new boss and friend, who had been following my progress in the field the whole time. Bobby had me set up in a room, got me fluids and some food. I collapsed for the next 12 hours.

When I awoke I was in an office somewhere in Ochsner, as they didn't have any beds for someone who wasn't critically ill like me. I finally realized where I was and what day it was. I realized that the last thing I had promised to do, and really had to do was to guide the Northwest Medical Team to the site for the civilian hospital. Much to Dr. Rodwig's wise protests to the contrary, I called Mornay and had him pick me up and get me back to the Sheraton.

When I arrived, I was amazed to find that my pharmacy had been disassembled and was being reassembled in a more secure and workable environment by Dr. Jeff Rouse. Jeff was a Tulane psychiatry resident who refused to leave when they evacuated Tulane, and had heard about the Sheraton clinic and come by while I was out of commission to help. And help he did. From then on he basically ran the Sheraton clinic, and put his psychiatric training to good use as the police force was beginning to collectively "lose it" both physically and mentally. In fact, I heard that essentially at the same time I collapsed, Captain Bryson, who was diabetic and had taken none of his medications for a week had also collapsed and had to be admitted for treatment. Jeff is one of those rare young doctors that give me such great hope for the next generation. He helped more people than I could count, provided a much needed order to the running of the clinic and always kept a cool head. We laughed when we said that who would have ever thought that of all the people to end up in this situation it would be a psychiatrist and a pathologist. The long awaited arrival of the Dept of Homeland Security had also occurred on Saturday night and they were beginning to impose their own brand of "order" on the situation. Jeff and I, I suppose were deputized by them, and given special purple armbands so that we could come and go as we pleased.

As Jeff had a much better handle on the medical management of the police force and a much better working knowledge of pharmacology than I, I left the Sheraton clinic in his charge and focused on the task of getting Northwest Medical in place to start the clinic.

This was now Sunday, September 4, and the word I was getting from them was that Northwest Medical Teams were trying like hell to get out of Baton Rouge. Mornay and I took a drive to the MASH unit to see if they could help us, only to find out that the MASH unit had packed up in the night and left to deploy in another part of the city. The only logical choice was to set up in the same place, as it was centrally located and accessible to air evacuation.

We drove around until we found members of the 72nd MP unit from Nevada. I told them what I wanted to do. They said if we could bring them some of our medical supplies, specifically Cipro and Zofran, as many of their team had diarrhea and vomiting they would do anything for us. Mornay and I rushed back to the Sheraton, got the Zofran and Cipro, and the alliance was formed. Captain Armstrong and Sergeant Samson of this unit deserve the highest decoration for their help over the next day. Without them, and their support and that of the NOPD, Mornay and I could never have secured the area we needed for the Northwest Team to be guided into the city and set up.

At around 11PM we got the call that the Northwest Team was arriving. We all hit the highway to escort them in, got them to the site, and exchanged our greetings and started cleaning the area and unpacking the goods. I thought I might be able to get back to Ochsner that night to assure Dr. Rodwig that I had not gotten myself in another mess (particularly since my formal employment date with Ochsner began on September 1 and I was now his responsibility), but the cell phone died and the police had long since retired to the Sheraton realizing that we had the protection of the 72nd MP's.

We slowed down around 4 AM and I had some time to sit down under the starriest night New Orleans had ever seen and talk with yet another saintly and remarkable man – Dr. Dan

Diamond. Dan told me all about Northwest Medical Teams, why he had gotten involved in it, and for the first time I saw a vision of something that, if I lived through all of this, I wanted to participate in. We talked about the possibility of developing mobile laboratory services for his organization, as that was something they often had to do without. We shook hands before he showed me to my cot, he gave me his card and said let's get through this and we can make it happen. As I lay on my cot that night, for the first time in years, I didn't just cry – I sobbed rackingly and uncontrollably with the blanket over my head so no one would hear.

On the early morning of Sept. 5, a light rain woke us all a few hours later. Within an hour people collected by the police began to show up and Northwest Medical Teams was in its full operational glory. Sometime that morning a truck with the governor, lieutenant governor, and General Honore who handed us all a medal and shook our hands showed up. A lot of pictures were taken and they were gone. I asked an MP what this medal was, and he said it was a general's medal – that military tradition says that you keep it with you at all times and if the general asks to see it you have to produce it. I threw it in my bag next to my Ritz-Carleton flashlight and pocket knife – maybe it might come in handy some other day.

Dr. Rodwig finally got me that morning – relieved to hear that I was alive and told me that I needed to get to Ochsner to help out there, as it was the only functioning medical center in the region. Mornay had returned, as usual, ready to help, and got me there. Rodwig got me a shower, some clean scrubs, a meal, and a good debriefing with one of the psychiatrists here at Ochsner, which turned out to be much more needed than I had thought. I did as much as needed to be done within the pathology department for the rest of the day and tried to get some sleep but the dreams of people at the convention center woke me up every hour or so.

Tuesday the 6th someone from Ochsner media relations told me that Larry King wanted me on his show that evening. I got a ride back downtown early for the interview. I checked in at the civilian center and as usual Dan Diamond and his crew were doing an incredible job seeing and evacuating about 200 patients a day. Dr. Juliette Saussy and her EMT team had joined them. I checked on the Sheraton clinic and Jeff was continuing to hold down the fort and had been joined by other young physicians and nurses who had driven as far as California and New York to help out there.

I made my way down to the river to the interview site. All I really remember is someone sticking an earphone in my ear, hearing Larry ask if it was a crime that this had happened in America and who was to blame, and staring into blinding lights answering that yes it was certainly horrible, that there had been failures on multiple levels but the real story was the human beings who came together to create a system that failed to exist. After 20 seconds the earplug came out, I was thanked, and a very nice CNN team of Elizabeth Cohen, health reporter and Miriam Falco, her producer gave me a ride back to Ochsner, as they headed back to Baton Rouge. It was then that I for the first time got the full scope of the collective failure at all levels that had plunged us all into this hell.

Wednesday, Sept 7, Dr. Rodwig decided that it was time for me to go home to Jackson, MS and get some R and R with my family. He offered to drive me halfway back if my family would meet me, but I had been told by the security force at the Ritz Carleton that my car was OK and that they thought they could get it out. I opted to head back downtown, thinking it was for the last time, get my car and go. On the way I got another call from CNN asking if I would be willing to do an interview on the water quality. I told them fine, as I would be downtown, and they promised it would be a short spot. It was then that I met Anderson Cooper and his producer Charlie Moore. If I could interject here, I have to say that through this entire ordeal reporters were everywhere, they grabbed me for countless impromptu interviews. Most of the time I was so exhausted I don't remember who I talked to much less what the hell I said. I did however begin to develop a sense of who was out there to tell the story for the real purpose of doing something about it, and who was, well let's just say, in it for less lofty goals. I was particularly impressed with Ceci Conolly of the Washington Post who put down her pen and paper to help me load sick

people on the school bus for evacuation, with Mr. John DeSantis of the New York Time and Wilmington Star News who committed his story telling to getting the relief efforts we needed. And finally by Mr. Anderson Cooper and Mr. Charlie Moore, who despite the fact that, as they admitted it is a vicious business dictated by ratings, are committing themselves to doing real journalism and are willing to go down with the ship doing just that if necessary.

Anyway, I went to the Ritz Carleton and found that contrary to what I heard the water was indeed still too high to get the car out. So I was, as they say, shit out of luck. I met Anderson Cooper at his station on Canal Street ready to do the interview and hoping that in return I could at least bum a ride to Baton Rouge. He agreed, but yet again all hell broke loose. During our rather simple interview about what kind of things were growing in the week-old water in the New Orleans streets, we happened on Mr. Thornton, a late-fifty year old African-American man waste deep in water and carrying everything he owned in two Hefty bags on his shoulders. We canned that interview and went to rescue him. He was in pretty bad shape, delirious, and dehydrated, but he told us that at least 25 more people just like him were still trapped in his semi-high rise low income apartment building, and had been there for 9 days. After debating whether or not we could get in the building and get these people out, there was concern that many may be armed. We decided to rush Mr. Thornton to the civilian medical station. We reported the trapped individuals to Dr. Saussy who mobilized military high water vehicles to get them out. I never got follow up as to their condition. Mr. Thornton was on a Huey helicopter within 45 minutes.

Anderson and Charlie said let's try and do this water quality interview later in the day, then they would get me to Baton Rouge. Later in the day came, and just as the live show was starting, we all watched a civilian helicopter crash less than a mile from our position. There was military all around, I told them I was a doctor, so they threw me in the boat and we headed to the crash site, several times hitting parked cars and getting faces full of putrid water. When we got to the site a rescue helicopter had arrived and removed the two pilots from the helicopter that had basically broken in half and was on the roof. The pilots were OK, but the downdraft from the helicopter had capsized one of the military airboats and two soldiers were floundering in the filthy water. We got them out. One insisted in diving back in and retrieving his weapon, and we got everyone back to shore and evacuated to a military hospital set up in Kenner.

I hobbled back over to Anderson who was finishing his show, and told them what had happened and made some general remarks about what complete mayhem this entire operation had become, and was grateful to have the mike pulled off of me and to have the time to watch the sun go down over the city, and wonder if I was ever going to get out, or indeed if it was right for me to ever leave.

Later that evening, the CNN crew fed me for the first time in a day and a half – never knew Dinty Moore stew and Crown Royal Scotch could taste so good together. Anderson and Charlie said that they would find a way to get me home if I could stay and do one more interview at the convention center the next day to tell about what had happened.

In the meantime, God came through for me again, a knock at the Winnebago door proved to be Mr. Dan Baum, a reporter from the New Yorker who was looking for someone trustworthy to return his rental car to Baton Rouge the next day, as he was moving on. I made an offer that I would get it back as long as I could return it to Jackson, MS. Dan and I had a deal.

I slept my last night back at the Sheraton clinic that by now had been joined by members of the US Public Health Service Rapid Response Team. I spent a long time talking with a Captain Jeff Brinkley, a 30 year veteran of the service who opened the conversation by asking if he could have my address to send me an apology card. "What for" I asked. He said because for the past 11 days you had to do my job. I asked him what happened. He said he had been ready to go for 9 days, but the beaucroatic sclerosis of the new Homeland Security Agency had held them all up. For instance his first set of orders had tickets for him to fly from his home in California to Newark. When he called to correct the destination to New Orleans he was told by the government

agent that it was a holiday weekend and they couldn't make any more changes.

The most poignant summation of how much we have devolved was basically summarized for me by a synopsis of his career. "Dr. Henderson", he said, my first deployment was in 1973. At the time I was drinking and eating in a bar. I got the call that I needed to be at the airport in an hour. I got there within the hour; they gave me a cheese omelette and a uniform. They loaded me and the rest of the troops on a C130. By 6AM they landed and said welcome to Managua boys. By 9 AM they had a field hospital set up to treat victims of the Managua earthquake. "Now this is probably my last deployment, and it took me 11 days to get to New Orleans to help my own countrymen – it's a disgrace and a hell of a way to end a career". I urge all politicians, policy-makers and physicians to ponder this story hard, because if we don't decide to change this system, raise hell to change this system, and implement the change, the jaws of hell will open again for us, and they will be very hungry.

Anderson, Charlie and I did our walk through the convention center interview on the morning of September 8. By then even I knew I was at the end of my ability to function. Every little reminder of that hellish place, particularly a pair of little kid's shoes set me off and I couldn't stop crying. Anderson and Charlie extracted something usable from that interview. Dan showed up with the car, and in the most joyous moment of my life, on the afternoon of the 8th I kissed and hugged my wife Isabelle, and my daughters Margaux and Ava, and my mom and dad again – something that I was pretty certain I would never again get the chance to do.

So Greg, this is what happened to you, what you did, and what you didn't do. I am writing this summary to you personally, so years from now if you are luckier to be an older man, you will remember what happened, and you won't forget, as we are often so inclined to do, that it became your duty the day you decided to put an M.D. behind your name. And maybe if you are lucky, if you meet the right people, if you tell the story the way it needs to be told, if you remain committed to teaching others about what happened, and if you remain always true to the only thing that you know that matters – making the world and life better for those who have the least - you might be able to go to your grave helping to immunize not only your own society but others around the world against a recurrence of this tragedy.