

Hurricane season...survival menu

by Lydia Lovell

We're due. Because almost 25 years have elapsed since the Cape was visited by a hurricane, we may well be wondering when (not if) the next one will arrive.

Hurricanes are born in the Caribbean and grow to tropical storms. Some tropical storms never achieve hurricane status; others mature to violent wind and rain storms of powerful and dangerous dimensions.

Experience has proven that hurricanes occur in New England in cycles. Sometimes for a number of years they travel from the Caribbean up the Gulf of Mexico and into states bordering that water body; in other years they bore in through the West Indies or across the Florida peninsula to boil up the Atlantic, sweeping inland anywhere between Cape Hatteras and Cape Cod. Once hurricane patterns are established, storm may follow storm, year after year.

During the cycle that began in 1938 and ended in 1960, six major hurricanes devastated parts of Massachusetts as well as mid-Atlantic and other New England states. Most damage on Cape Cod in 1938 resulted from flooding, although wind damage was also considerable. That storm brought a tidal wave ashore from shallow Buzzards Bay and Vineyard Sound, inundating low-lying areas, carrying boats, large and small, inland and dropping them, high and dry. It took out bridges, cleared shorefront properties of buildings, and eliminated barrier beaches. Property damage totaled millions of dollars. The toll in lives was in excess of 600.

Six years later a second hurricane ripped across the Cape. Although no tidal wave accompanied the 1944 storm, ferocious winds drove powerful waves on shore, waves that forever changed beachfront all along the Cape's south shore. Winds of more than 100 MPH tore at trees, toppling thousands. Airplane pilots, flying over the Cape after the storm moved out to sea, described the scene as "looking as though the gods had been playing jackstraws." Cottages had disappeared, barns were flattened, and church steeples had pierced sanctuary roofs. Utility services were disrupted in all coastal areas.

The next fifteen years saw four more hurricanes roar in upon Cape Cod, culminating in the arrival of Donna in 1960. Donna is credited with being the most costly hurricane to reach New England since records were kept. Her billion-dollar price tag was mitigated, however; only 50 people died. Since then, all has been quiet and serene, but do not be deceived. Another hurricane, someday, is bound to come this way.

How do you prepare for such a storm? Well before any warnings are issued, make plans. The hurricane season traditionally begins in August and continues through October, but can extend into November in rare instances. Protecting life is paramount; protecting property is secondary.

Assess your own vulnerability. If you live on or near the shore, or in a low-lying area that might flood, be prepared to evacuate. Hundreds of lives are saved because people are ready to leave exposed locations before a storm. Store inside a building anything and everything that is not tied down. Move valuables to upper levels, not into basements. Make certain all family members know exactly where to meet in an emergency, and obey rescue personnel.

For those who live further from the water and on high ground, prepare to ride out the storm and its aftermath. Well before a storm is reported, make a list of preparations. Bring movables inside: trash barrels, birdbaths, lawn, porch and patio furniture. Flying debris can injure or kill. Tape large windows or install wooden shutters over sliders and picture



windows.

Stock up on non-perishable foods-- dry milk products, canned meats and vegetables, cereals, fruit juices, peanut butter, jellies, dried fruits. Keep a few extra loaves of bread in your freezer. Unless your kitchen has a gas stove, make sure you have a grill, hibachi or sterno stove for boiling water. Be sure you have an ample supply of fuel. Wood or coal-burning stoves can cook almost anything. Lay in extra batteries for flashlights and radios. Keep candles handy. And matches. Figure on being without electricity and telephone service for several days.

A well-stocked freezer will hold contents safe from spoilage for three days if kept closed. But to remove food, the door must be opened, so cook meat and frozen produce as soon as they begin to thaw. Cooked food will keep better and longer than raw. Garden produce will be battered but is edible for a few days. Root vegetables (carrots, potatoes, onions, rutabags or turnips, and beets) suffer the least damage unless the garden is flooded with salt water. In case of flood, pull vegetables as soon as the storm subsides, rinse, dry thoroughly, and store in a cool place.

Immediately after the 1938 hurricane, Aunt Olivia built a fire in her woodstove and roasted or stewed all the meat in her refrigerator; we had no freezers in those days. She had had foresight enough to fill several large pots and buckets with fresh water. We saved that for drinking and cooking because the electric pump that delivered water from her well was inoperable for six days after the storm. To flush toilets and wash bodies, we hauled pond water. We boiled pond water to wash dishes.

As day followed day, after the storm, everyone waited for electric power lines to be repaired. We polished off chicken, bacon, roast pork and beef; we saved canned meats for the day fresh meat was all gone. Aunt Olivia sent us to the garden for bruised greens. Wilting lettuce was carefully cleaned, freshened by soaking in cold water for 30 minutes, dried

thoroughly, and garnished with edible portions of tomatoes and cucumbers. After two days, Aunt Olivia threw out mayonnaise and prepared salad dressings.

Beet tops substituted for greens when the lettuce was gone. On string bean vines, beaten to the ground, we found enough beans to make a huge bowl of salad. After par-boiling ten cups of string beans, Aunt Olivia sliced up several onions, mixed them with the beans, doused them with 1/3 cup of vinegar and 2/3 cup of olive oil, salted, peppered, and sugared the mixture to taste. Stored in the cool cellar, the combination kept well for several days. Cucumbers, sliced thin and weighted with a plate and a brick, then drained, were similarly kept in brine.

By the fourth day, the fresh meat had been eaten. Then Aunt Olivia baked a big pot of beans in the woodstove's oven, and opened a canned ham. Although a trickle of food deliveries was coming onto the Cape, neighborhood stores had no refrigeration either. On our pantry shelves, there were still two cans of stew, several of fish, ample stocks of corn meal, macaroni and rice; we had opened only a few cans of vegetables. Our family could have continued to eat well for at least another week.

The work crews of the utility companies succeeded in repairing downed lines, however; with refrigeration restored in markets, shipments of dairy products, meats, and fresh produce poured onto the Cape by the truckload. Power soon surged to residential properties. Refrigerators hummed, electric lights glowed, water and gasoline pumps rumbled to life, and electric stoves came back into service.

Once things returned to normal, Aunt Olivia's grocery list was long. She had no intention of being caught without emergency stores should another hurricane strike on the heels of the last one.

Artist at Historical Society museum

Mrs. Barbara Mayo Grass, a graduate of Vesper George School of Art, will display her work at the Jonathan Parker House next Sunday.

Mrs. Grass, who has studied still life painting under Robert Brooks and Fred Fiandacca, and portraiture with Margaret Fitzhugh Brown, has exhibited in many juried shows north of Boston as well as at the Heritage Plantation Cape Cod Artists' Day.

Her interest in textile arts developed in conjunction with her painting experience. After studying with area, national, and international teachers, Mrs. Grass received her Advanced Professional Studies Certification from the American School of Textile Arts, Pine Manor College, in 1982.

In addition to giving workshops in color and design, conducting painting demonstrations and lecturing, Barbara Mayo Grass designs needlework.

The public is invited to meet Mrs. Grass and watch her at work painting the Colonial Garden at the Osterville Historical Society museum, corner of Parker and West Bay Roads, on Sunday, August 28, between 3:00 and 5:00 p.m.