

# Path of destruction: What Hurricane Harvey left in its wake [video-photos]

From Corpus Christi to Houston, Texas (CNN)It begins with a couple of shingles in the road, a power line down here or there. The caravan of utility workers is a sign that things are getting worse. And then, at the Pioneer Beach Resort in Port Aransas it becomes clear that Hurricane Harvey came through with a vengeance.

RVs are lying on their sides, windows blown out. Debris is everywhere. Any trailer that wasn't moved before the storm was destroyed, says Buddy Seeds, an owner there.

Riding a golf cart through the park, he shows a newly built rental cabin that's been lifted off its foundation and flung at least 300 yards away.

"That one floated all the way to the dunes," he says, pointing at the unit. The deck is all that remains. Mangled metal and snapped wood are strewn across the park, which is busy again, but with people hauling away ruined homes, or checking what can be saved. One man hangs sopping wet clothes on a line next to his damaged home. He hopes they are salvageable.

Seeds and other owners say the storm's massive power caught them by surprise. About 4 feet of storm surge flooded the area from the nearby bay, flinging every trailer onto its side.

"The wind is what started the ball rolling ... and then the water finished them off," Seeds says.

A week after Hurricane Harvey slammed into the coast near Corpus Christi, Texas, and then dumped foot after foot of rain on Houston and its neighbors, we crisscrossed the 200 miles between the two cities to witness what the storm had left behind.

For some communities, it was the wind that did the damage. For others, it was the flooding from the massive rains. And for some, who had seemed to dodge both those bullets, it was a surprise late attack from rivers overflowing with the

floodwaters heading south from Houston trying to find their way to the Gulf of Mexico.

No matter how the destruction rode in, how different the damage was, the devastation was deep and severe.

Walls ripped off

Three and a half miles down Highway 361 from the RV park, utility trucks line the road alongside businesses that have been leveled. Power lines and traffic signs dangle from broken poles. Boats have been thrown into the street like toys after a toddler's tantrum.

A local liquor store's four walls are gone. But some shelves are still standing, holding row after row of bottles of Patron and Crown Royal near six racks full of wine. It smells like a rotting winery on one side and like a bar at closing time on the other. Glass and liquor cover the floor.

Next door, in front of Moby Dick's, one of Port Aransas' most beloved restaurants, owner Ed Ziegler stands at a pile of muddy debris. It used to be the front of his restaurant.

The sign is torn in half. The shark that hung outside the front door was flung toward the back of the restaurant. Mud is everywhere.

Inside, a back door was rammed by a boat that was swept in. Chairs are knocked over, covered in debris, but some silverware still remains perfectly wrapped in a white napkin atop a table.

Ziegler, 62, estimates he may have lost \$2 million in Harvey's wake.

"But at least I'm alive," he says.

Ziegler counts himself lucky. His family left ahead of the storm, but he found himself sheltering at home. The storm sounded like a jetliner crashing outside, he recalls.

It sent sea water gushing in. He sat on a chair on top of his dining room table as his refrigerator bobbed around the living room.

"I was making water marks along my wall as the water rose up and I figured I was

just going to have to write goodbye to my wife and kids at the top mark," Ziegler says.

When he finally dared to leave, he says he passed a turtle in his living room and a tuna on the street outside.

A scent of destruction, and generosity

Arriving in Rockport, the smell of chopped wood permeates the air. Mangled trees are all around and those that are still standing look dead, with all their leaves ripped off.

Parts of the town are flattened, with damage severe in its Heritage District.

But help is here, too. The HEB supermarket parking lot looks like a military command center, with trucks from nearly every branch of service present. Across the street, a ladder is being used to fly a large American flag over the local fire department. A food truck offers a cooked meal to residents with no gas or power.

Bad as Rockport looks, a neighbor warns worse is to come down the road.

Signs at the entrance to Holiday Beach warn looters to stay out and declare "Holiday Beach Strong."

Strength is certainly needed here, where residents consider themselves lucky if their building is still standing. Row after row of homes are broken. Roofs and second floors have just been peeled off, crumbled kitchens have fallen into canals.

Peggy Bourg bought her home four years ago. It was everything she ever wanted; she could even fish from her back porch. Now, she stands on the second floor, completely exposed to the sun. The roofs and most of the walls have been blown away. A red vacuum cleaner stands upright in her spare bedroom against a wall that's no longer there.

A large green truck is in her backyard. She believes it was pushed by the storm across an entire street. Appliances are there, too, coming from who knows where. And entire pieces of Bourg's own furniture have disappeared.

Bourg, a former resident of Louisiana, knows what a hurricane can do and she fled town before Harvey barreled through. She prayed and prayed her home would be spared, even as she watched neighbors post photos on Facebook

declaring their entire houses were gone.

And then someone sent her a picture of what remained of her home, and she had to get back to see for herself.

"It was a dreary day. It was still raining, it was muddy ... and you're numb when you go through something like this," Bourg says.

She had forgotten to take her mother's ring when she evacuated, leaving it on the kitchen windowsill, and it was one of the first things she looked for when she returned. Despite nearly everything being scattered, destroyed or thrown into the canal, her husband found it when he was picking through debris upstairs.

"[It was] very emotional. I don't think I can cry anymore," Bourg says, still choking back tears. "I've gone through a lot of emotions — a lot of anger, sadness, you know, even envy: Why didn't my house make it?"

Some concern and bitterness also creeps in, with the aid and attention other areas are getting.

"This area has been hit very hard. You know I feel for the people around us, the Houston area, the Rockport area," she says. "We're across the causeway from Rockport. It's almost like, do they know we're here?" Have they seen all of this destruction?"

Where wind gave way to water

Two miles north on Highway 35, a barbed wire fence has almost become a memorial to the storm. It has caught debris from miles away. Along with mangled metal, pieces of doors and furniture, smaller items hang from the fence: someone's beige winter hat with ear flaps and a tassel on top. And then a bright red child's life jacket comes into view, snagged on top of the wire.

A dead cow lies in the road, water and mud covering it.

Farther down Highway 35, near Tivoli, the pure wind damage begins to give way to the flooding, with water lapping over the pavement, and sheriff's deputies closing a road.

By Victoria, the water flows through fences and more roads are closed. A long line of cars is funneled toward Main Street, where the power is still out.

But with Victoria in the rearview mirror, it soon becomes clear the flooding there was haphazard and sporadic. At Van Vleck, a town closer to Houston than Corpus Christi, the rivers had taken over entire neighborhoods, rising 3 or 4 feet from the ground, residents said.

At one flooded home, a father and son were too emotional to talk, wanting just to keep going, ripping out drywall, pulling out their refrigerator, even as the water kept flowing through.

Outside, it sounded like a babbling brook, but it was overflow from a nearby bayou spilling into homes and over sidewalks. Fast-moving water, more than a week after the storm first hit.

Sudden, belated flooding

A couple of dozen miles north in Wharton, residents first thought they were going to escape unscathed. Trouble for them didn't begin until Wednesday. The rain, the wind from Harvey, that wasn't the problem. It never directly hit them. But all the downpours from up north, and especially Houston, were overflowing rivers, including the one in their town. And now it was destroying their homes.

The rivers haven't been this bad since 1913, Howard Singleton says. Singleton and his 18-year-old son Shane have been out helping their neighbors.

"For the past three days most people have been trapped in their homes because you can't drive around town because so many roads are flooded," he says.

They helped the parents of a fellow church member — the husband on oxygen, with limited battery backup if the power went out — to get out before the roads closed completely.

Shane Singleton took a small fishing boat with no motor over to a friend's house and ended up rescuing several families. Howard Singleton proudly shows off pictures of his son, who used a rope to help get neighbors from their homes to his boat. Then, wearing waders, he physically dragged them through the water to safety.

While many people have lost their homes to this disaster, the younger Singleton says he is thankful so far he has not heard of any loss of life.

"With any natural disaster there's going to be anger and sadness, but at the same

time there's happiness that people were left with their lives," Shane Singleton says. "They may have lost everything but they still have their family."

But still, one week after the storm, the danger isn't over.

"It's a little concerning to see it getting closer and closer to your house and not knowing when it's going to stop," Howard Singleton says.

His words were prescient. Within a short time, several feet of water began to flood the town, sending police and National Guard units into action to block off roads that were no longer safe.

Trying to save soaked treasures

The big fields of the southern suburbs give way to the bright lights of Houston on I-10. The highway is finally clear of water, and people are streaming in.

Early Saturday morning, residents of the northeast Houston community of Lakewood are out in full force. They are wearing gloves and masks and pushing wheelbarrows, which are filled to the brim, mostly with drywall from their homes.

The rank smell of mold and mildew fills the air. Front yard after front yard is full of belongings brought out from flooded homes. Some people try to air out what they can to save it. But most of it is being thrown into dumpsters

This part of town was deluged with so much water that the waterline in Waylon Doucett's home was above his head. He's 6 feet 5 inches tall.

Jose Rodriguez and Veronica Mendoza have already pulled up their carpet, and then the hardwood floor they didn't know was there. They've taken out the furniture that was soaked. There's so much more they haven't gotten to yet and they don't know what the future holds for them, they didn't have flood insurance.

They struggle the most with what to tell their daughters, age 3 and 11, who keep asking when they can come home.

They stand in their daughter's room with purple walls, half of it now torn away.

Rodriguez says he showed his 3-year-old daughter some pictures of the home.

"She asked, 'Why did you tear my purple wall down dad?'" he recalls.

On the other side of the bayou, Felicia Darden has no idea what's safe to save. What about those mattresses? They are standing up in the garage and driveway. They're soaked.

She is hoping if all else is lost she can save a few prized possessions — her 8-year-old daughter Eden's birth book, and photos of her growing up. She's got them laying across her grassy yard under the Houston sun.

"Those are things you can't replace," she says.

He told her, "I gotta clean."

Just the thought of them not surviving brings tears streaming down her face. She just wants her daughter to be OK. Darden has learned her school will open on Thursday, though she doesn't know how she'll shuttle her back and forth.

But she prays it will bring a bit of normalcy.

Darden talks about how Eden appears resilient, but she wonders what her daughter is internalizing. She wonders what the future will hold for them. She wonders how long all this will take to get better.

And that of course is the great unknown.

There were genuine outpourings of kindness and generosity visible along the road, and so much pride and resilience was expressed that towns and Texas will get through this.

Back in Port Aransas, Ed Ziegler watches volunteers wash mud off chairs and says, "Now that I've seen the actions of people, my hope is restored. As well as my faith in the human race."

Howard Singleton's view was that "Sometimes crisis shows a town or a person's true character, and it's brought out the best of the people in Wharton."

Full coverage of the aftermath of Hurricane Harvey

But for all that powerful positivity, it's hard not to think of the fear of people like Felicia Darden.

She and so many others don't have the answers yet — not for tomorrow, or a

week from now or the many months ahead when they will struggle with the aftermath of Harvey.

CNN's Michael Pisano contributed to this story.

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Source: <http://www.cnn.com/2017/09/04/us/hurricane-harvey-from-corpus-christi-to-houston/index.html>

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