

FOREVER CHANGED: PARALLEL PROCESS THROUGH THE EYES OF TWO HURRICANES

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Surviving an M.S.W. program took on new meaning for the players in this scene when nature decided to redesign the set. The 16 students and two instructors in this real-life drama of survival had no idea that their classes would be joined by two additional members: Katrina and Rita. This is the authors' story of helping, hurting, loss, recovery, empowerment, and multiple parallel processes in social work in the midst of Katrina and Rita. Participation in these processes was not symbolic, not virtual, but actual paths forged by two hurricanes.

"I realize some may not be able to stand under the pressure of this program AND rebuilding their lives, but I, for one, am gonna give it my best try. I really want my master's degree, so I will do it...I am sorry for you that you have had the added responsibility for us at this time. My one real concern is that you and Dr. T. will decide we just aren't worth THIS much effort. I will do what you ask and to the best of my ability at the time" (M.S.W. Student, personal communication, October 4, 2005).

Prologue

Our story would be one dimensional if we did not first share the context of our work and our understanding of how the concept of parallel process emerges and extends from client to the social work classroom and back to the client. So before we begin our story, we will introduce our readers to our East Texas Region and to the concept of parallel process.

Jefferson County (pop. 252,000) is located in southeast Texas on the Gulf of Mexico, about 90 miles east of Houston. The county seat of Beaumont (pop. 112,434), and the city of Port Arthur (pop. 57,755) are the major population centers, although part of the county and nearly all of the surrounding counties are rural. While the area has many challenges, in 2004 there were no programs for graduate social work education within 80+ miles of the area. After multiple requests for assistance and because of its focus on rural advocacy and rural empowerment, administrators at Stephen F. Austin State University, located in

Nacogdoches, Texas, agreed to offer its M.S.W. program in Beaumont beginning August 2005.

The two authors (KB and ST) have long been committed to providing advanced social work education, particularly to practitioners without access, and agreed to make the weekly round trip of 250 miles to begin the program. However, the 16 students and two instructors (authors) had no idea that their classes would be joined by two additional members, Katrina and Rita, who ultimately became the real instructors, teaching the students and professors what they cannot learn from a textbook. This is our story of helping, of hurting, of loss, of empowerment, and of multiple parallel processes in social work. It is also a story of survival – how people have the inner ability to survive not only what is known to them but also what is unknown.

Parallel Process

Parallel process, first identified by Searles (1955 as cited in Ganzer & Ornstein, 1999) as the "reflective process," is a concept that is most often related to clinical practice in which therapists unconsciously enact the issues they are dealing with in the supervisory experience. After years of practice as a clinical social worker and supervisor of practitioners preparing for licensure, ST considers parallel process to be an important element across social work settings, particularly in social work education.

Kahn (1979) refers to parallel process as a situation in supervision in which emotional

difficulties in the social worker-client relationship simultaneously play out in the supervisory relationship between the social worker and supervisor; the emotions felt by one are acted out in the other, implying that the difficulties the supervisee experiences with the client are carried into the supervisory session and reenacted with the supervisor. For example, many of the apprehensions that a social worker takes into a new supervisory relationship are similar to those experienced by a client in initial interviews with the caseworker. Seminally and simply stated, Arlow (1963) refers to parallel process as similarities between the supervised case and the supervision of the case. In contrast to the concept of secondary trauma in which "bearing witness to trauma stories can evoke in clinicians the confusion and emotional turmoil their clients' experience" (Geller, Madsen, & Ohrenstein, 2004, p. 415), parallel process refers to a situation where both the social worker and the client or the social worker and the supervisor experience the same phenomenon. Although the literature refers to the fact that both social worker and supervisor experience the same phenomenon, it may not always be at the same time. The occurrences described in this narrative were such that both supervisor and social work student experienced them at the same time.

While most literature focusing on parallel process targets clinical practice, this phenomenon extends beyond the clinical arena. Workflow Management Coalition [WMC] (2006) for example, defines parallel process straightforwardly as "a process in which two or more sequences of activities are going on simultaneously." Sullivan (2002) reports that parallel process is now an appreciated facet of organizational research and consultation as consultants and clients relate and tend to reflect dynamics that exist within the organization under study. From this narrative, it is clear that the reflective nature of the parallel process is not only limited to the clinical context.

We found one reference to the application of parallel process to teaching in general (Miller, 2004) and one to social work education, which is Ganzer and Ornstein's (1999)

discussion of parallel process in field instruction. In this reflection of our experiences with graduate social work students who faced hurricanes Katrina and Rita as both helpers and victims while being taught by faculty who lived through the same events, we follow the lead of Ganzer and Ornstein (1999) as we apply parallel process to social work education. These authors relocate parallel process from psychodynamic supervision to a larger relational matrix where it is "one element in a complex, interactive process and serves as a marker for further exploration in reflective social work practice" (p. 231). Further, we expand WCM's (2006) understanding of parallel process as a situation in which multiple sequences of activities are occurring simultaneously and add, from the traditional clinical perspective, that these events occur on multiple levels within the system. In this instance, victims of hurricane Katrina received help from M.S.W. students who were victims of hurricane Rita and were studying under social work faculty who were both helpers to Katrina evacuees and victims of hurricane Rita, as well. Community of Works, Inc. (2006) captures the essence of our experience as they speak of the complex parallel process interactions that occur between traumatized clients, stressed staff, pressured organizations, and hostile economic and social forces in the larger environment.

Parallel Process in Action

We believe that the experience with these M.S.W. students in the midst of hurricanes has given birth to new dimensions in the parallel process. The evidence of the birth of new dimensions is found in the narrative provided in this article. These dimensions add important new knowledge to the broad knowledge base of parallel processes. Perhaps there should be another term for exponential parallel processes such as these that encompasses multiple levels of intervention beyond that of the social worker – supervisor relationship where these students, feeling overwhelmed by the challenge of locating resources and services within an already strained rural system, not only came to class each week seeking strategies and solutions from their professors,

but also sought solace for their own beleaguered selves.

They were secondarily experiencing the helplessness felt so strongly by their clients, the families seeking the barest essentials of shelter, food, and safety. Maslow (1943) would most assuredly have exclaimed, "Ah ha, I told you so! Students cannot focus on A.P.A. format, social work theories or the ideal intervention when their clients have no place to sleep!" Pure research, such as grounded theory, begins in this type of experience. And so, much of the time in the classroom was spent helping students cope with their own frustrations and feelings of inadequacy as helpers in crisis work while we as educators struggled with our own anxieties about ensuring that the students received the content necessary to prepare for advanced generalist practice. As one student commented, "...this is the Olympics of social work." The following ominous forecast came from another student in an email:

"I know that there are so many things that still need to be done for the hurricane victims. I have to admit I am relieved that the news has slowed down somewhat. When I watched TV, I was just pulled into it all and it was hard to turn off. But it has really made me look around my house and examine what is really important should this happen to me. I think about all the wonderful "things" I have and how comfortable I am. I can empathize with these people who just want to go "home." Home, where they have all the things that comfort them. And it doesn't matter what kind of people we are talking about...rich, poor, or in between. We all have our comfort zone and when it is taken away, we have lost so much. I pray these people find peace wherever they end up."

Students as Helpers

The following are excerpts from class correspondence, including emails and discussions, and a timeline of hurricane-related events. KB refers to Kathleen Belanger and ST refers to Sharon Templeman, the authors of this narrative. Other speakers are the students in the class (S).

8/23: *KB—Welcome to SFA! I'm delighted to meet all of you and to learn together. Make sure you read your email on WebCT, since this is the way I'll be communicating with you....*

8/27: HURRICANE KATRINA, AT LEVEL 3, APPROACHES THE LOUISIANA COAST AND A FEDERAL STATE OF EMERGENCY IS DECLARED.

8/28: 7 a.m. HURRICANE KATRINA HAS BEEN UPGRADED TO A CATEGORY 5 HURRICANE, AND A MANDATORY EVACUATION OF NEW ORLEANS HAS BEEN ORDERED.

8/28: *KB—We have been assigned the following classroom at Lamar University... textbooks are available at.... We have materials available through the SFA library... See you tomorrow!*

8/29 7 a.m.: HURRICANE KATRINA, A CATEGORY 4 HURRICANE, SLAMS INTO NEW ORLEANS

8/29 7:30 a.m.: NEW ORLEANS LEVEES BREACHED; 20% OF CITY FLOODED.

8/29: Classes begin; KB teaches SWK 504 and SWK 514 in Beaumont.

8/30: 2ND LEVEE BREACHED IN NEW ORLEANS; 80% OF CITY FLOODED WITH WATER AS HIGH AS 20 FT.

8/30: EVACUEES FROM LOUISIANA POUR INTO EAST TEXAS, INCLUDING BEAUMONT AND NACOGDOCHES.

8/30: ST teaches SWK 525 in Beaumont.

9/1-2: Questions about texts, assignments, etc.; numbers of evacuees in East Texas increase dramatically; all social work students, KB and ST volunteer at Red Cross shelters.

9/2: KB—*It appears that the texts will be arriving soon...I know this is a hard time for many of you. So many of you work in responsible jobs, are already doing incredible things to help others, and many are returning to school after several years...the hurricane is a very real disaster, with evacuees in both Beaumont and Nacogdoches. There might be ways we can use the work that's being done in light of the current crisis...*

9/2: *Thanks for the encouragement. Many of us need it! Local government is looking to our N.G.O. to accomplish the disaster relief needed for our new neighbors. There is a pervasive feeling of neglect from the Feds and national organizations. We are in reality the "poor relations" of Houston/Harris County. We are in fact doing fabulous work without external support or resources. To the best of my knowledge, FEMA has not appeared and is not expected until Tuesday...Please tell Dr. T. that I would like to attend class Tuesday, but I may be compelled to continue working the disaster. My team needs a break and there is none in sight. Please keep us in your prayers. You are in mine.*

9/3: KB—*I am sure that by now you have already reviewed the history of social work.... If you have a little time to spare, spend it helping the agencies who are overwhelmed helping evacuees. We don't have class Monday since it's Labor Day.*

9/3: SUPERDOME EVACUATED; LARGE NUMBERS OF EVACUEES ARRIVE IN BEAUMONT AND AT MIDNIGHT IN NACOGDOCHES; KB STATIONED AT A NEW SHELTER AROUND THE CLOCK; ST ASSIGNED

TO MENTAL HEALTH DUTIES ACTOSS SHELTERS.

9/4: KB—*Helping the evacuees is more important at this point than any class assignments. Class on September 12th will be a debriefing in relation to rurality (SWK 504) and professional practice (SWK 514). Any contributions you are already making toward assisting the evacuees are all the preparation you need for class. By the way, I'm writing this from a temporary shelter (one of three) in Nacogdoches. While we've had families here in our city all week, just tonight the city received hundreds of evacuees from the Superdome. The ordeals they have survived have been horrific. We have several people here still looking for their children and other members of their families, many separated by the evacuation effort in New Orleans. If you have people in a shelter there, email me outside of class and I'll send you the names of the families I'm hunting.*

9/4: *I spent the day helping people post on the Internet. The Ford Park shelter is using www.gulfcoastnews.com. They have consistently had 1,500 people there so the list is growing and growing. Try that one.*

9/5-20: Classes continue in Beaumont during which there are numerous student comments concerning efforts to help, appreciation for instructor recognition of the crisis, and encouragement in helping.

9/11: *I am so blessed to be in a position to really help, and that has inspired me beyond my expectations. Every time I accomplish something or find information that helps someone, I did my touchdown dance and said "Social work rocks!" Those people could not avoid laughing at my fool self.*

A New Storm Rages

Meanwhile, the authors are heavily engaged in our own volunteer efforts to serve Katrina evacuees in the crisis shelters in our own community over a hundred miles away.

Then, just as we began to feel some sense of stability, reports of another hurricane appeared in the news. Anxieties arose again.

9/18: TROPICAL DEPRESSION BECOMES TROPICAL STORM RITA.

9/20: HURRICANE RITA REACHES CATEGORY 2.

9/20: Just wanted to touch base before I become an evacuee myself... We are now under mandatory evacuation. Port Arthur and most of Beaumont is supposed to flood... Please pray for everyone down here – leave it to Texas to be the “biggest and best”... Now we will see it straight on from the other side of the hurricane issue as the Katrina folks did... My family is splitting up – going to three different places in the Lakes area. But honestly, there is no place to run and no place to hide; the storm is just too big. There were no hotels short of going to Lubbock [575 miles]... I will let you know how things are as soon as we return... now the question I ask myself is what is important as I leave my home with the uncertainty of what may come of my worldly possessions. It is truly a... humbling feeling.

9/21: HURRICANE RITA STRENGTHENS FROM CATEGORY 2 TO 5. GALVESTON, HOUSTON AND THE COASTAL AREAS (BEAUMONT, PORT ARTHUR AND SURROUNDING TOWNS) BEGIN EVACUATION, INCLUDING EVACUATION OF HURRICANE KATRINA SHELTERS.

9/21: In the event that Rita were to force our evacuation, I'd be compelled to accompany my nursing home employer and its residents to Tyler. I know it's unlikely to unfold that way, but things do happen. We'd likely be back in time for Monday's class in any case though.

9/21: I am taking my children and we are going to stay with family in Louisiana. I own a mobile home and don't feel

comfortable here. My three-year old is running around packing all her favorite toys and wondering how my five-year old will have enough time to get all his things after school... I think she must sense something is wrong...

9/21: It has been the longest few days of my life. I am afraid and plan to evacuate during the early morning hours. I don't know when I will be able to get back to a computer and/or if I will have a computer when I return. I reside in Port Arthur, in one of the three flood zones...

How interesting it is that so many feelings experienced by the students are the same as those felt by our clients.

9/22-23: TRAFFIC JAMS, GAS SHORTAGE AND STALLED CARS HIGHLIGHT THE EVACUATION OF THE GULF COAST.

9/24: HURRICANE RITA SLAMS INTO THE GULF COAST, INCLUDING PORT ARTHUR AND BEAUMONT AND CONTINUES IN HURRICANE FORCE TO NACOGDOCHES, 145 MILES INLAND.

9/25, 26, 27, & 28: POWER AND GAS ARE OUT THROUGHOUT EAST TEXAS; GAS SHORTAGES EXACERBATED BY HOUSTON EVACUATION INTO HURRICANE PATH.

Rita ransacked East Texas with destruction so severe that the students fled to places across the nation to maintain their own safety and that of their families. While not displaced, KB and ST also struggled to provide for ourselves and our families and to help the thousands of new Rita evacuees in the community. Seven additional shelters were opened in Nacogdoches, almost overnight, with KB now stationed at a new church that had no previous Red Cross training, no supplies, and limited facilities; but there were volunteers with big hearts. With no electrical power for a week, even in many shelters, most relied on

the rumor mill for news. KB kept apprised of events through local police and the Office of Homeland Security. The August heat was insufferable. The lines to obtain bottled water, ice, and gasoline were endless each day until the signs appeared announcing that supplies were depleted. What a sense of relief came with the arrival of each truck with new supplies; we were totally dependent on our environment.

For what felt like an eternity, we had no information about the safety or whereabouts of our students, reminding us that powerlessness exudes from the absence of information. Then gradually as they located Internet access in their places of refuge, they began to report to us of their whereabouts and situations across Texas; later we learned that some had fled to other states. All had evacuated. We set up discussions through Web/Ct so that students could communicate with one another. Most did not know if their homes were damaged or destroyed, if they had jobs to return to, or when they could return. Other students maintained contact with us through relatives who had cellular telephones and knowledge of their status. Each had a heart-wrenching story to tell:

9/25: I can't believe I got into this screen. Yea! I heard I have one of my chimneys in my front yard. They won't let anyone in Beaumont yet. The doors were blown off of our shop...

9/26: ...You're right of course. We are social workers, after all. At this time, however, my social work skills are simply trying to keep my head together enough to get through this emotionally intact. Certainly, almost all of our homes have at least some damage and the institutions and organizations that we count on for our day-to-day lives are simply not there. Very hard, indeed. I keep thinking that when I watched TV news about people being evacuated all those years, I have always felt so sorry for them but could not even imagine what they were going through. Well, now I can certainly imagine. I wish I had been left without this knowledge...we will definitely

have a lot of talking to do the first class we get together. It's somehow comforting to have you on the other end of this computer connection. You're once again the quintessential social worker. Now your skills are helping us.

9/26: I am OK. I have heard that my roof has blown off, fencing down, but all that is OK. I have no idea what to expect about my daughter's school. I have no idea what to expect from S.F.A. I don't know if I have the strength to continue. But I want to. How are we going to handle all this? Please email me even if you do not know. I need stress relief!!

9/27: Yes, thank God! Insured!

9/28: Just checking with you (from Austin shelter). I'm very blessed that all my family made it out of Rita's wrath. It took us 25 hours to go from Beaumont to Austin [250 miles]. We checked in at Henry's Middle School and were later transferred to Vistas Ridge H.S. Oops! My baby just woke up. I will continue tomorrow.

9/28: I haven't been in touch. I was doing the FEMA, Red Cross, find a hotel shuffle. I am tired and really feel for those (us) hurricane people now for sure. I'm sorry the storm has interrupted our program... I am uncertain of the damages to Lamar...Law enforcement is not allowing anyone in Jefferson county...I'll try not to worry too much.

9/30: ...I finally found my nursing home (relocated in Houston) and am staying here while I work with our poor, disoriented residents. They are suffering so much more than we are. The ones we have in our care here (two hospitalized) are disoriented and afraid. I am learning a lot here. My house is... a total loss. My mother's house, however, was unscathed and I will stay with her when the power comes back on. So, I am fortunate. I am soooo ready for regular work, school and normalcy!

Reports continued to trickle in sporadically:

"We are in Dallas. I'm staying at my ex-husband's youngest sister's house. My ex and his wife went back...yesterday morning and found their house destroyed. My house is much damaged as well. It may be totaled. Man, this is TOUGH! I am worrying about that as well as what this all may mean to our continuing the program in Beaumont.

I have not heard about my house or my parents' house. However, I spoke with my supervisor...she said that a restaurant that was down the street from our unit in Orange...the roof was blown off...roofs have holes...porches flew away...power lines are down, no water, no lights and no phones for a few."

9/30: BEAUMONT, PORT ARTHUR AND OTHER CITIES ALLOW RESIDENTS TO RETURN AFTER 7 A.M. BUT REQUEST THEY LEAVE THE AREA BY 7 P.M. IN GENERAL POWER IS STILL OUT; THERE IS LITTLE FOOD OR OTHER PROVISIONS.

"I have been out of reach lately. We have returned to Port Arthur, to such a depressed environment. My Internet access is limited to my church's computer and the house that...my family is staying at had their phone service restored on Thursday. I am hopeful that things will get a little better now. My house...is in an unlivable state and so is my parents' home. This is such a frustrating situation...nonetheless, I will be...ready to gradually jump back

into my graduate schooling experience."

The Internet emerged as an important method of catharsis during this time. For a month we remained in frequent online communication, providing support to one another and continuity for the students as best we could and in our own ways, knowing that this was an extremely vulnerable time for student commitment to the M.S.W. program.

10/7: *On top of dealing with my family and the hurricane itself, my job instructed me to return to work this week and for the first time in a long time I felt like a helpless single parent because there was no one to care for my daughter. When I expressed this to my employer (State of Texas), I was told that they could not help me and that I should attempt to locate friends or relatives. Needless to say, I am seeking other employment. [Expresses gratitude for help and concern.]*

10/7: *I will be leaving Texarkana tomorrow to go back to Beaumont, but probably to a shelter, [because of] mold in my house. The kids start school on Monday and I'm supposed to work on Monday. I may not be able to get my paper to you in time because my system is not running. My husband said the Cable (our carrier) is not working. I am going to try to use someone else's system. If I can't, will it count against me? I know I am going to need all the points I could get...Thank you and have a nice night.*

10/8: *I have a co-worker who was living in Port Arthur with her four children. Thank goodness she was able to evacuate to Austin. But due to the damage at her apartment complex, she has been evicted...She and her children are staying in Austin under the assistance of FEMA and Red Cross and are being moved from place to place. Right now she is on leave without pay and is unable to return to work because she has nowhere to live and no child care.*

Her children are not enrolled in school because there is no transportation available...

Classes resumed quickly on the main S.F.A. campus, but we had no idea when and how classes could resume at our distant site at Lamar University. That university sustained severe damage, especially to the technological infrastructure upon which we depended so heavily. Our contacts reported a series of three contingency plans as outlined in emails. The most optimistic prediction was for classes at Lamar to resume October 12th. More likely they would resume on October 19th or 26th. At the latest the university would be functional by November 2nd.

10/12: EVACUEES ALLOWED TO RETURN. SUPPLIES SUCH AS WATER, CLEANING PRODUCTS, ETC. ARE DISTRIBUTED TO PEOPLE IN FORD PARK ACCORDING TO ZIP CODE

Ultimately our classes resumed on October 24th, one month after hurricane Rita pounded the region. KB taught SWK 504 and SWK 514 in Beaumont; ST resumed with SWK 525. Meanwhile, students continued to struggle to care for their own families.

10/28: *[My daughter's] reverse walker was damaged in the evacuation and her breathing machine melted.*

10/31: *Do you know anyone who has 4 airbeds we can have? My parents' home is flooded so we have to throw everything away because of mold. My sister is housing 11 people at present, including my parents and family. Medicaid called about the new walker and breathing machine [for my daughter]. They said that the lifespan of the equipment is 5 years, and the walker and breathing machines are only 2 years old [evacuation damage makes no difference].*

But returning to class was only half of the challenge. We also faced the challenge of somehow making up the material missed while

moving forward with new social work content and maintaining the integrity of the M.S.W. program. Just as the students sought a sense of normality in their lives, we sought a sense of normality for the profession. We were committed to covering the same material and having these students complete the full slate of assignments required by all students in the program. Through close collaboration we developed an intensive weekend-long make-up schedule in which we would cover the most critical content and processes. With hotels in Beaumont closed due to damage, the university still closed, and no other sites available to meet, we brought the students to Nacogdoches for what became affectionately known as the social work "marathon" weekend and to others as the "retreat," referring to the relief the students felt to come away from their hurricane-ravaged city to a more relaxed environment. Logistically the main campus also had the library and technology resources necessary to make the weekend effective. Meanwhile, the distant cohort was nurtured with meals and support from the Graduate Association of Students of Social Work (GASSW) on the main campus. GASSW members loaned textbooks to their distant colleagues and managed to replace some of their destroyed texts through advocacy with publishers. Clearly, the strong bonds developing between the professors, the professors with the students, the members of the Beaumont class, and the Beaumont class with the students on the main campus revealed parallel process in action.

The two-day agenda was packed to include critical thinking exercises; development of a researchable question; how to conduct a literature review; the uses, components, and application of social work practice theories with all types and levels of populations; library training and how to use PowerPoint. To maintain interest, optimism, and enthusiasm for completing the semester, a variety of teaching techniques was utilized: role plays; a game of jeopardy to learn social work theories; and the use of puppets, games and art supplies to practice assessing make-believe child clients all evoked frequent laughter and playful bonding. Even the librarian who volunteered

to work on her weekend off opened her session with karaoke to lyrics she wrote to mock Katrina and Rita. Perhaps the students' own words best sum up the marathon/retreat experience:

"I think this weekend was extremely beneficial in providing a significant amount of information that was missed. I felt much better about being able to complete the program. I think the exercises and games that were played were excellent for practice application. I truly feel that this weekend provided us with a sense of calm that we have all been lacking. It also gave us a chance to bond as a class without having to be concerned about being home to make dinner!"

"This weekend is really great and very helpful for me...the timeframe is what really works for me. I was ready to drop this weekend, but the two of you make it very hard for me to do so. You are both so understanding and 'motherly'...I rate this weekend a '5'. I know that I can do it!"

"Before coming to S.F.A. this weekend, I was feeling as though the best thing for me was to drop. I was feeling stressed, couldn't concentrate or focus. Today I feel empowered to move forward to progress in my studies."

"On a scale of 1 to 5 this weekend rates a 5+...you guys are THE GREATEST! Not only was this weekend informative, but it also had some therapeutic qualities which were extremely needed for most of us...I now have a clearer

understanding of what's expected of me as a graduate student and, too, a better understanding of how to deal with...my own anxieties and issues regarding this journey. I honestly have a renewed mind and I am hopeful that I will be able to put my best foot forward and produce quality graduate school work...if I could have chosen a time to experience a natural disaster while in grad school, I would have picked to go through this struggle with you guys!"

What was once "we" and "they" transcended into "us." Parallel process continued to evolve as we each learned from one another...isn't that the way it should be? For example, not all feedback was positive and caused us to evaluate our own performance as we reflected on feedback such as this:

"I am still concerned about the problems with using the library resources. The lab yesterday just exacerbated my concern...I worry, still, about not getting articles that...will be on the test. I am worried about getting these papers completed and done well. Other than the worries with the library, I love the program."

"I think more time in the library was necessary for me because I was so mixed up with a doable research question...if we would have had access to the articles instead of emailing them and no computer to pull them up."

"On a scale of 1 to 5 = 3 (better than indifferent) because certain, more vocal students received more one-on-one with professors, therefore will leave

with more done and feeling more productive. Although, breaking down the paper into pieces was very effective and the support from both professors was very much appreciated and needed."

"I was not prepared to enjoy this weekend – what a nice surprise! Most helpful – better understanding of fallacy and theory. Least helpful – tutorial on RefWorks."

We knew we had reached a pivotal point when students laughingly referred to their two invaders as "Katrita" and we received this email from a student. "On my way home from school I saw this sign on the billboard of Elegante Hotel, 'Dear Santa, please put Rita on your naughty list!'"

Six weeks after Rita crashed into the area and as the semester ended, 13 students of the original 16 remained in the program. Only two opted for a grade of incomplete to allow additional time to finish course assignments. To commemorate their victories over the devastation of "Katrita" and their successful completion of the first semester of the M.S.W. program, in December the students planned and held a celebration to which we were invited. The evening was filled with both tearful and joyful reflections and stories of challenge, trauma, survival, victory, and the type of true camaraderie that can only be shared by those, such as soldiers, who have endured unimaginable adversity together.

Student Assessments

At the close of the semester, students were asked to evaluate the distance education track of S.F.A.'s M.S.W. program. The students were asked to comment on both the positive and negative impacts of the hurricanes on their education. Most students agreed that on the negative side, the traumatic events surrounding hurricanes Katrina and Rita triggered confusion and an inability to focus or concentrate for a period of time as they

were displaced. "It is hard to concentrate on school when your home, business and financial status [are] in the negative," said one. "Papers, tests, readings are due and with full-time work, family, activities in church, conferences, etc., there is not enough time to do everything," said another. We are reminded of the adage, "When you are up to your armpits in alligators, it's hard to remember that the original objective was to drain the swamp." Another student noted, "I discovered I am human and that post-traumatic stress can hit me, too."

When reflecting on the positive impacts of their experience, several students noted an awakening to their own resilience. Others expressed a new appreciation for what it is like to understand the impact of crisis, including involvement in crisis work and knowledge of disaster preparedness. In the voice of still another, "I think the hurricanes positively impacted my education by testing my capabilities and providing an experience that I have never had before. I had to learn how to relate to people in a completely different way." Indeed, this kind of learning cannot be found in a textbook.

Finally, we believe the following comment from the evaluation captures the essence and benefit of recognition of parallel process in social work: "During hurricane Katrina I was involved with helping victims obtain services and sometimes just to listen. Hurricane Rita humbled me and I was able to see through the eyes of a survivor in a natural disaster."

Forever Changed

Social workers know about crises. We've studied poverty and homelessness, crisis intervention, numerous ways to assess, intervene, and evaluate in numerous contexts. But do we understand? We, the instructors and students of S.F.A. and particularly those in the Beaumont cohort, believe that we are changed because we understand what we thought we knew.

Feeling Insecurity/Understanding Hope

For the first time we all, particularly those in "Rita's wrath," felt real insecurity. Dealing with the evacuees from Katrina, we were compassionate toward those suddenly evicted

into uncertainty. "We have trouble deciding what shoes we're going to wear...but having to redirect your whole entire life..." But even after the countless hours of working with those displaced in Katrina, the students were shocked to feel it themselves.

"When you are forced to leave everything that you know, it gives you a strong feeling of hopelessness and lack of self worth."

"One thing I know for sure is that no amount of reading about what it is like to be evacuated during a catastrophe will ever make a person truly know what it feels like. Not knowing what you are going to have when you finally do get back to your home is almost more than a person should have to bear."

However, now we all understood not just the importance of hope, but its components. One student who worked in a Beaumont nursing home helped the residents relocated in a Houston gym to find normalcy in abnormal conditions. She helped them to discuss their shock and talk about their worries; she brought simple games to play and set up activities with which they were familiar. Meanwhile, as a Red Cross mental health volunteer in a Nacogdoches shelter, ST remembers the overwhelming feelings of helplessness as a young man sobbed with guilt over the loss of his father to the flood waters of New Orleans. While helping his elderly father escape on a makeshift raft, he glanced back only to discover that his father had fallen off the raft and drowned. Yet, with fragile resolve, a few days later he was making plans to reunite with his remaining family and to start a new life in East Texas. KB found that her major contribution in the Katrina shelter was to set up a table with the poster "Planning." Evacuees would stand in line to have the opportunity to dream a new life, and a faith-based organization she helped found years earlier then secured the

resources to make that life begin. The social workers/students/evacuees experienced their own despair transformed:

"We didn't know when we could go home.... If we had a home left...when or if we would be returning to school. As a student I was thinking that we will never be able to make all the work up. Surprise! We are doing it! I find myself [now] telling my clients that we don't always know when, where or how something will work out but we have to have the faith that it will...Sometimes we have to dig really deep inside ourselves to hang on but it WILL be ok. I had to give myself this little talk several times over the past few weeks."

Experiencing Confusion/Understanding Patience

There is no description for the degree of confusion brought on by Katrina and Rita. The authorities in Beaumont and Port Arthur wanted a voluntary evacuation, but according to one student/social worker:

"[Places of employment] ...would not let them go unless it was mandatory. Also, the kids were excused from school to evacuate, but the adults had to go to work, leaving no one to watch the children not in school. I just kept thinking whose bright idea was this?"

Most Rita evacuees spent 20 or more hours on roads with no gas, food, or water, evacuating to places with no shelters. Churches opened their doors, while businesses shut theirs for fear of looters. One church in Nacogdoches had 300 evacuees without a single trained volunteer for the first two days. Trained volunteers were still engaged in the Katrina shelters. People slept on the floor without even

a blanket, and for almost two weeks 300 people waited to use two bathrooms with no bathing facilities. It took several days for Red Cross to recognize the church, and did so only when they admitted there was no other place for the people to go.

But now we all understood not just the importance of patience, but also its components such as sharing information and knowledge. KB learned patience with the pastor (she hopes) as she tried to explain the need for shelter rules and policies, while assessing evacuees for immediate risks and successfully transferring 100 people to a special needs facility. Miraculously, they are still friends.

Patience starts with appreciation of the small steps toward success and an appreciation for our inner ability to survive. One student, all alone and nearly out of gas after "driving" 20 hours in the evacuation, began to realize that she was getting dehydrated.

"Getting desperate, I saw a man walking down the street holding a sign that said free water. I thought he was kidding, so offered him the dollars I had with me. He just laughed and said, 'No ma'am, it's free. I'm from the Salvation Army.' He gave me two more bottles so I could give some to my dogs. I thought I would cry. Hundreds and thousands of people stuck on the road together, but we all had a strange sense of calmness. I saw no flared tempers, no road rage, just people willing to help each other."

Standing in long lines waiting for services and being given conflicting information prompted one student to exclaim: "I have learned that patience really is a virtue."

Experiencing Isolation/Understanding Community

The feelings of isolation were a surprise to many. As evacuees, the loneliness of the flight was a surprise to one independent social

worker/student, particularly when it was so difficult to arrive anywhere. Another said, "I never felt so poor and unwanted in all my life." As helpers, many of us also experienced isolation. As social workers, we worked in locations that often didn't understand our skills or the needs of the evacuees, sometimes in churches with different political or religious views than ours. One student/social worker fluent in Vietnamese worked with Vietnamese evacuees, translating, assisting in paperwork, and advocating. Another social worker assisted in a church shelter that had been openly antagonistic to people of her faith. The loneliness of the Katrina evacuees was punctuated by the elderly woman whose only son lived in Japan, and whose most valuable resources were pinned to the inside of her bra. But the ultimate isolation was the separation in New Orleans of family members. Many of us spent countless hours assisting evacuees in locating and reuniting with loved ones, including minor children, who had been placed on separate buses for the trip and then rerouted to different destinations. We applied the basic methodology that addresses the need of the "client" system...the need to be connected with family and loved ones.

While in the throes of isolation, we came to a deeper understanding of community. As one student conveyed, "I value relationships a lot more, all relationships: mother/daughter, employee/employer, student/teacher." The student who had nowhere to turn with her young son was welcomed into the home of her ex-in-laws (but not for too long!). As one student said, "I was reminded just how important my family is to me and that we should all make more time to stay in touch with each other." Japan suddenly did not seem that far away as we located the son, in spite of language barriers, and comforted the elderly mother. Understanding the desperate need for communications, church members came with their cell phones to create a phone bank, allowing family members to find their separated members, and in a few days time, tears of joy in finding loved ones alive replaced the frantic dialing and dialing. Church members with Louisiana business connections found a friend in Louisiana who, in a brief time, was able to

find a 13-year-old boy who had been separated from his mother and then hospitalized for emergency surgery, and return him to the shelter in Nacogdoches. Child Protective Services negotiated with agencies in another state for the return of another child to an evacuee in our city. Assistance crossed the lines of race, class, and religious beliefs as walls of prejudice were removed and replaced with love, hugs, warm food, blankets, pillows and toys, demonstrating that ultimately a sense of belonging overrides the baggage of division. The vision of one global community is now imprinted indelibly in the minds of many of us. As one student put it, "And this time, I can't distance myself. We are all in this together."

Experiencing Dependence/ Understanding Social Work

For the students, most of whom were working full time in social services while they attended school, the tables were now turned. Those who had been accustomed to helping others were now the ones needing assistance, and the feeling was awful. The theme of fear resurfaced.

"I had mixed emotions about applying [for FEMA]. I did evacuate and was definitely out of money, but still had reservations about applying for this assistance. 'Will I be one of them driving up to the welfare office for assistance, after I have worked so hard?' And I do not know how long I will be able to go without a paycheck...I definitely now understand what it is like to be a client, and through this experience I can be more empathetic and hopefully a better social worker in the future."

"The bills piled up. We had a disconnect notice from the city... Food and medicine were now in short supply. This was something that we never had to face before."

"Pride took second place when I went to the Texas Department of Human Services. The workers talked down to you and had no respect for a person's dignity. After several weeks...I was there for three hours, signing my life away, and fingerprinted to get an E.B.T. card. I got \$73 for my family for two months."

However, it was in experiencing dependence that we learned how to be true professional helpers.

"I had to make a mental note to myself to never talk and treat people like this if I ever work in such an agency."

"Suddenly the principles of social justice, dignity and worth, objectivity, and [client self-determination] flooded my thoughts...."

Many students could give specific examples of problems in a variety of systems, and even in the aftermath of the storm began to advocate for system changes. By knowing firsthand how it felt, they know how to change, not only the helping systems, but themselves. We as teachers know more about the multiple lives of our students and have increased respect for their courage, dedication, and contributions to the lives of so many others.

Conclusion/Epilogue on Parallel Process for Social Work Education

This story of helping, surviving, and reflecting illustrates through a dramatic, complex, and multidimensional natural disaster that parallel process can emerge between students and clients as well as between students and teachers in social work education as it does in clinical practice. "I remember thinking, 'What would I do if this happened to me?' Now that it has, I can't recall giving myself an answer." The parallel process of

helping, learning, receiving aid, and teaching all occurred simultaneously during the fall semester of 2005. In addition, participation in these processes was not symbolic, not virtual, but actual paths forged by two hurricanes. The impact on all of us? We are indelibly changed, with a permanent bond forged among us, members of a community of survivors in a broader global community with hope, patience, and understanding.

The value of the experience lies, as Miller (2004) suggests, in the realization that these dynamics are used to gain insight into the issues that are being faced by the student group. In this instance, we also believe that parallel process helped us to design real-time, often in a virtual classroom, interventions that allowed the students "to work with the here and now dynamics...that provided the basis for rich and meaningful learning" (p. 383) for us all. And we all agree with the words of one student that this experience "made me know for sure and certain that I am a social worker, not only by degree, but in my heart."

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