

December 9, 1991

Dear Rich, Dave, Marie, John, Phil & your Loved Ones:

I thought that all of you would like to have a copy of Nana's actual letter to her parents and her brother telling them about her experience of living through the hurricane in Miami, Florida in 1926.

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Miami, Florida  
Sept. 22, 1926

Dear Mom, Pop & Frank:

I'm dead tired but just simply have to write and let you know all about the hurricane.

Friday the evening paper warned us of a coming storm, but no one thought it would be so disasterous, for most everytime a hurricane was headed for Miami, the Gulf stream broke it. But this time it fooled us. Our neighbor, Mr. Bowes, was warned by his foreman to take off all loose wires and scaffolds from the building on which he was working, as a terrible hurricane was heading for us. Well, Mr. Bowes warned all of our neighbors, and all those in frame houses cleared out. Bowe's waited for us until 8 P.M.. You see, we were over to Charlie's for supper. Fifteen minutes later we got home and wondered where the Bowes were. Well, we were the only ones in our section, everybody had cleared out. And we didn't know a thing about it. At 3:45 Saturday morning our car port blew away. Willie and I sat on the bed, all dressed, ready to run when the house caved in. The house swayed back and forward like a boat. You see outside the trees and debris was falling right and left, inside we were in danger of being buried alive..

At 4:55 (we sat on the bed watching the clock, the minutes seemed like hours. It was pitch dark, and raining and blowing like hell), our house was lifted off the foundation and set down on the next lot. We were inside of it, and couldn't get out. The well platform was wedged against the kitchen door. The front door was out of line and wouldn't budge. We finally managed to get out of the front room window, and ran over to our neighbor's house. Willie literally dragged me over, for we had to go against the wind. That we didn't get hit is a wonder, because trees were falling right and left. Well, we broke into Bowe's house. At least we had shelter. At six o'clock it was over. We went over to our house. Not a thing was hurt inside. Only the house was completely turned around like

this. (In her letter, Nana drew a diagram showing the house where it had been and where it was after the hurricane).

Our front room windows used to face the street, now it's the bedroom. Well I made coffee and Willie tried to get the "Lizzie" started. (Note: The "Lizzie" is a nickname for a Model A Ford automobile). We just got through with coffee, about 6:20 A.M. (Saturday) when it started to hale. And then it started to blow and rain as if all hell was loose. During the first storm the wind had been coming from the north. At 6 A.M. when the second storm started, the wind had turned around and was coming from the south.

Thursday, Sept. 23

I got Papa's letter this morning. It has upset me so that I had to stop working. Today we only got through ironing the clothes that got wet during the storm. What work. We never got a telegram from you. Tuesday Tante got one from Willie's father. Tuesday night Willie sent a telegram to you and Tante sent one to the Beiswengers. (Note: Tante was Willie (my father's) aunt.) I mailed a letter to you Monday morning. I hope you got both, if not, I know that you will be almost crazy by now. We tried to get a telegram through to you before Tuesday, but couldn't, as all the wires were torn down. Mama and Papa, if I had my way I'd be home by now. But there is Willie. He is thinking of building a two room bungalow. My proposition is to see the man we bought the place from and get as much cash out of him as we can and beat it home to Ridgewood. The quicker I get home, the better. I have had enough of Florida. When the storm hit us we had just \$3.00 to our name. Willie had been out of work again for a week and a half. That engineer's job only lasted a week. Monday Willie made \$5.00 helping put on a roof. Yesterday and today he's been working as a tile-layer. God knows what he'll be doing tomorrow. I hope he'll make enough so we can pay Tante our board at the end of the week. Willie hasn't seen your letter yet, so I can't say what we are going to do. If I had my way I would come home on the next train. I'll have Willie write you about what he wants to do, when he comes home from work tonight. And now I will go back to my story of the hurricane.

When the second storm started I was in the kitchen. It blew the door open. I stood against it, and with all my force, I couldn't hold it shut. Willie had to nail it shut with 8 penny nails. The second storm is what did all the damage, most of it anyway. We had to retreat to our neighbor's house again. We no sooner got in it and the front porch of that house blew down. We stood by a window ready to run to the next house, which was also vacant, when that one should cave in. But thank goodness it didn't. About 7 A.M. the roof flew off our house. That's what finished us. Now it stands there, a complete wreck. The bedroom and half of the



living room has the open sky above it. You see, it took off one half of the roof. But we can't do a thing with it except tear it down and rebuild. It's all out of shape. But we managed to save our furniture. Of course it's somewhat damaged, but it's better than none at all. The bedroom set we have by Tante in the front porch room. We sleep there too. The radio, cot, and rockers and chairs we have by the Bowes'. The rest is still in the house, that part where the roof is still on. How we both worked and saved and now it's all gone to the dogs. Our clothes will be all right after they are cleaned. All the pretty linen and fancy work is saved too. That's one consolation. But my clock. It's smashed. It was standing in the part of the house where the roof blew off. The ceiling caved in on it and smashed it. Well, I don't give a damn, as long as we are alive. We are both young and strong, and can start all over again. But I want to get home. I feel like doing just what papa says, "lass den ganzen Dreck liegen und komme Heim". (Translation: Leave all the junk lay and come home.) If only Willie would say yes.

Charles and Doris and the baby came down to Tante. (Note: I don't know who these people are, probably relatives of my father.) They arrived at 3 o'clock Saturday morning. A few minutes later their house caved in. They have lost almost everything, house, clothes and furniture. Pauline and Carl were running Sheet's Place. (The filling station on the corner near Tante). That place was wrecked too. They only had to run across the street. And there we were all alone in our shanty. Tante was almost crazy. She never expected to see us alive. At 6 A.M. Saturday morning when the first storm was over, Carl, Charles and Joe started out to get us and were caught in the second storm. They parked the car alongside of a house. And there they had to stay for three hours. Then they finally got out and brought us over to Tante. Saturday and Sunday night us three young couples had to sleep on the floor in the dining room. Carl and Pauline's shack is gone completely. They saved their furniture, and have rented a bungalow. So Charles and Doris, and Willie and I are staying with Tante for the time being. Tante is a nervous wreck. Joe is in bed again. Tante's roof was slightly damaged and the front porch. The car port fell down right on their car, but didn't damage it. This morning Joe hurt himself working around the house. His lungs. He can't get his breath. I'm afraid he will have a hemorage.

Miami is a wreck. I don't think there are 50 houses that weren't hurt. The big Meyer-Kaiser building is turned around. It must be torn down. The Daily News Tower is at a slant. It's also condemned. Miami Beach is completely wiped out. They are dragging the bodies out of the water. How many were killed and how much damage was done, will never be known. I haven't seen down-town. But Tante says

it's a mess. She went down to the bank Monday and the sights were so awful that she fainted. Hialeah is a mess. I've seen that myself. Every roof is gone, frame houses are completely wrecked. Some stucco houses withstood it. The most deaths and injured people are in Miami Beach and Hialeah. We are lucky that we are all alive. But it's something I'll never forget. I almost went crazy, and that's the truth. But I'm surprised how I stood it all, after all. I've been working like hell helping Tante get her house straightened out. My house is gone, it can't be straightened out any more. Nothing but bad luck for us in Florida, and I want to come home. Now don't worry about us, we are alive and healthy, and that's the main thing. (Note: Nana now writes in German for about two pages, and then my father, Willie writes the following.)

Dear Folks:

Don't expect me to write very much because I'm dead tired, and its way past bedtime already. Well, Marie wrote everything already, so there isn't much for me.

The only thing is that she wants to go home right away, well, in a way I do myself, but then again, on second thought, it will mean losing everything.

So I've been thinking, I don't know if you've read it in the papers up there, (we'll send you some later on) that there are some big builders here, who are giving all their services free to the people of Miami, to put up their homes again, who can't afford to put them up themselves. I know we can have ours put up again. First it will have to be torn down completely, then I want them to put up a little bungalow with two rooms and a porch.

Then, when the winter comes maybe we can rent it out, that I'm sure of and if possible we'll sell it, which will be better yet.

Well, folks, as Marie wrote before, don't worry about us, we are all together yet and healthy which is the main thing, and as soon as things turn out a little better we'll be home.

Before I close, we went to see the owner of the house, and he told us we don't have to worry about our payment on the 1st of the month, just forget it, so you see that helps a little bit too.

Well, everybody's gone to bed so I reckon I'll have to turn in too.

Bye, Love and Kisses,  
Willy



Of course, my mom and dad did not stay in Florida. Soon after this letter was written they went back to New York in their Ford "Lizzie" and in 1929 I was born in Brooklyn instead of Miami, Florida.

I also have a "narrative" which my mom typed many, many years later about her experiences in Florida which I'm sure you'll also enjoy reading:

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There isn't any date on the following story, but if I remember correctly, Nana wrote this sometime in the late 1960's.

I think that Nana intended to send the story in to Reader's Digest for publication, but apparently never did so.

It was late on a lovely September afternoon in Miami, Florida. The sky was beautiful, with a copper colored hue. The sun had set, but there was still some light. My husband and I were driving home from a movie matinee, and were trying to decide whether to stop off at Aunt Helen's, little knowing that this decision could have meant either life or death for both of us, as the unfolding of this narrative will show.

On this September day I had only been married a little over six months. My husband had left New York the previous year for Miami, and liked it so much that he decided he would like to make it our permanent abode. In April, my dad took me down there, and we were married. The world was wonderful. We had purchased a bungalow and we moved into it as soon as we were married. And then our troubles began. There was a Real Estate slump, the building trade had layoffs, unemployment set in, and the new-comers, of course, were the first to be laid off. So our married life began, with my husband out of a job. We struggled along by his taking odd jobs. I worked a few weeks in the Five & Dime (McCrory's). Of course, my parents would have helped, but we were too proud to ask.

On this particular afternoon, we were down to 37 cents in my purse, but we were celebrating for my husband had obtained a job in a Filling Station. Our Fliver tank was full of gas, and we had two passes for the Valenzia Theatre. So we decided to take in the show; and we also decided to go right home afterwards.

As we drove up to our house we were struck by the fact that

our neighbor's five children were nowhere in sight. We dined on pineapple and mayonnaise sandwiches, for that was all we had. My husband remarked, as he looked out of the porch window, "Gee, that's funny, it's dark across the way, they must be out, and it's also dark next door." We were tired, and did not turn on the radio. After sitting on the porch for a time, enjoying the cool breeze coming from the Everglades, and being thankful that our porch had screens, for the Everglade breezes always brought mosquitoes in swarms. As we retired we again remarked to each other about the lack of action around us.

We felt tired and happy, for tomorrow my husband would start his new job, and soon I was fast asleep. Suddenly, I was awakened. All fury had been let loose, the wind was howling and the trees around were swaying wildly back and forth. We were sitting on the edge of the bed, worrying about our Ford automobile which was quite unprotected under the Portocushay (car-port). Very few people in Florida had garages. The fury of the wind increased, and then it happened - I felt our bungalow flying through the air, my husband and I landed under the kitchen table. We were in the midst of a Hurricane. Instinctively, we ran to the back door, but it wouldn't budge. Outside the back door was a pump on a platform and this platform was wedged against the house, and the door was jammed. Later we found out that this was due to the fact that the house had gone out of alignment. We tried the living room window, it was jammed too. So we broke the glass and the screen, and climbed out, and ran over to our neighbor's house. After pounding on their door and receiving no answer, we entered as the door was unlocked. To our horror we discovered that no one was there. It was 2 A.M. The fury outside continued. Suddenly there was a crash - a huge tree in the backyard had uprooted and fell onto the roof of the house. I was hysterical and wanted to leave, but my husband reasoned: "This house is big, it has seven rooms, where can we go, it is safer in here, so here we'll stay." In desperation I started the phonograph to help drown out the fury of the storm outside, and there we sat, huddled together, thinking each minute would be our last. It was now 3 A.M., the minutes dragged, and suddenly the living room floor started to lift slowly, slowly higher and higher, then it eased down. I stared in fascination and horror. It was 4 A.M. and it seemed the night would never end. Again the floor started to rise, and then slowly ease down again. Finally the dawn came and we at least could see what was happening outside. The wind lessened and I heard knocking at one of the side windows. There stood our neighbor, Mrs. ...., a gash on her forehead, the blood streaming down her face. My husband lifted her into the house, for both the back and front doors were blocked. Louise was happy that we were unhurt. After giving her first-aid we discovered that the injury was not as bad as it looked. And then we compared notes. And this



is what had happened.

Our neighbor's husband had been sent home from work early to evacuate his family. The hurricane warning had gone out over the radio just about the time we were driving home from Miami to our home in Seminole Lawns (this now belongs to Miami Proper). All residents in bungalows were told to evacuate to more substantial buildings, as schools, churches, etc. Our neighbors had gone to an Inn in the vicinity, about 10 minutes walking distance from our location. All the people in our neighborhood had been evacuated. When the police came to our home, they found no one at home, and thought we had followed the radio instructions. Had we stopped at Aunt Helen's, we too would have been warned. We would also have learned that a copper studded sky is an indication of an impending hurricane. After the storm had abated, Mrs..... walked from the Inn to look for us, and it was then that she got hurt by a piece of flying tin.

My husband and I then walked over to our place to see what damage had been done. The car was intact, but the house was no longer on our property. It had gone sailing through the air, with us in it, and settled down on the lot next to ours. I said, "Guess we can have the house moved back, and maybe it can be made livable, anyhow, the furniture and clothes are okay." Mrs. .... started back to the Inn and her family.

Suddenly it started to hail, big lumps of ice about the size of golf balls came down; the wind started to blow, and the rain came down. All fury was let loose again, the hurricane had turned and come back. It was worse than before. I clung to my husband and he dragged me from tree to tree until we reached our neighbor's house and we again took refuge there. This lasted until noon. After things had quieted down we again crossed over to our house. It was a total loss, and wind had taken off the roof, the ceiling had collapsed, the furniture which was walnut veneer, was ruined, our remaining clothes which had not been blown away were salvageable. A trunk which contained my linens were all right except for mildew stains. My husband's job was gone too, the Filling Station was a shambles.

Suddenly, I heard a car, it came nearer and nearer, and when it finally came into view I saw my husband's two cousins. They had started out to our house when the hurricane first abated, and were caught up in the second storm. They sat it out in their car and were fortunate that they weren't hit by flying debris. They piled us into their car and took us to Aunt Helen's house which was not extensively damaged.

There we stayed. We had all lost our homes. We young people, the two married cousins and their children. At

night it looked like a gypsy camp at Aunt Helen's. The Red Cross had brought mattresses, and we spread them on the floor. Neighbors, who had no quarters came too, there were eighteen of us sleeping on the floor. The National Guard was called in, as people had started looting the stores in search of food. The work of the Red Cross was wonderful. Every day they came and brought bags of groceries - all kinds of canned food from which the labels were missing. So we would shake the cans and try to guess what they contained. I remember once we opened six cans in a row and they all contained sauerkraut. So we ate sauerkraut! All the electric and communication lines were down. In Miami proper there was chaos. Buildings had been twisted. The highway connecting Miami with Miami Beach was under water. People fleeing from Miami Beach to Miami were washed off the highway, car and all, and drowned. Houses were washed away. When the waters receded, there was a yacht lying on the steps of a large building in Miami Proper. I remember the first three nights as I lay on the floor listening to the constant shrill of the ambulance sirens, and the feeling of thankfulness which came over me because we had gotten safely through this catastrophe without being hurt or losing our lives.

I came down with a high fever, due to the exposure for I had been wet to the bone for hours that first night. I was thankful for the clothes that the Red Cross had given me. The Red Cross also sent a doctor to take care of me. They did a wonderful job and I shall always support the Red Cross. Finally I got through to my frantic parents. There, too, the Red Cross was instrumental in getting the telegram through. After three weeks I received \$50.00 from my dad, and we decided to leave for good old New York, in our old Ford.

The car was a two-seater roadster, open, and the tires were bad. We were on the road three days and three nights, fixed about 32 flats, lived on hamburgers and coffee, and drove and drove, sleeping a few hours at a time. Once we almost were arrested for vagrancy, but a sympathetic State Trooper gave us a buck and told us to drive on. This was just outside of Jacksonville, Florida.

I remember one incident which still sends chills down my spine. I remember that we had left Raleigh, North Carolina about 4:30 P.M. and were heading for Richmond, Virginia. It became dark, and somehow we had strayed off the highway and landed on a narrow country dirt road, apparently in the Blue Ridge Mountains. It was lonely, and occasionally one could see a delapidated hut, obviously lived in by poor Blacks. The car started steaming, we needed water for our radiator. I saw someone and asked directions which we followed and led us over a narrow rickety bridge with no side rails. I thought surely we would land in the stream. There was water



below but we had nothing with which to scoop it up, and we needed it so badly, the car was steaming like a locomotive. But we struggled on. I then saw a cabin, and there was a well and a pail. We stopped, and as I wanted to get out of the car two immense black dogs came bounding up, and started barking and fletching their teeth ferociously. I was petrified. Suddenly a light went on in the cabin. A Black man stood there in his long-johns, he put on his pants (there were no shades on the windows), opened a drawer at the bottom of a dresser and took out a shot-gun. He came out, called off the dogs, and came up to us and inquired what we wanted. He was very friendly and excused himself for toting a gun but explained that nobody ever came up here at night and you never know who it is so he had to be careful. I told him we were refugees from the Florida hurricane. He lowered his gun and gave us permission to take water and directed us to the highway and wished us good luck. As the dawn came we found that we had hit a city, but I was amazed to find that it was Raleigh, N.C. I discovered that we had traveled in a circle and were right back where we had started the night before. It wasn't the first time that folks had lost themselves in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia.

Tired and hungry, we reached good old New York safe and sound. I realized we had made the entire trip on \$50 and with the help of the good people we had met enroute.

All this happened a long time ago, September, 1926 to be exact. I am now a grandmother and there is no communication gap between my Hippe Grandson (Richard?) and myself. Hurricanes, tornadoes, earthquakes go on, and when such emergencies occur people are always willing to lend a hand. It was so in the great blackout in 196\_, again in the recent blackout when people were stranded in subways, elevators, etc. Everybody forgot their differences and helped each other. I cannot help but think if we can act like this in times of emergency, why cannot we be so all the time? The world would certainly be a better place to live in.

Marie Knopf Augustin