Chapter 3

Hurricane Andrew

Except for several tropical depressions, June, July and half of August of the 1992 hurricane season was quiet. The last late start was Anita back in 1977 on the 28th of August, in the Gulf of Mexico.

But on August 14th, 1992, satellite photos indicated a strong tropical wave off the African coast in the area of the Cape Verde Islands. This system moved west for two days and developed into a tropical depression near 11.6N and 40.4W early on the 17th. By noon of the 17th the winds were 40 miles per hour and Tropical Storm Andrew was named. This position was about 1175 miles east of the Lesser Antilles.

By the 20th, Andrew was in trouble, with winds less than 45 miles per hour and the barometric pressure was that of normal sea level; the whole system was shaky. At this point, San Juan, Puerto Rico, was only 350 miles southwest, but Andrew had slowed down!

The next morning, however, winds were up to 60 miles per hour and pressure had dropped to 29.71 inches. By 2300 on the 21st, Andrew was 610 miles east of Nassau, in the Bahamas, with 65 mile per hour winds.

The morning of the 22nd of August, air recon confirmed that, "Andrew is now a hurricane". Winds were 76 miles per hour, pressure was 29.35 inches and he was 800 miles east of Miami, Florida.

By 2300 on the 22nd Andrew was moving dead west at 15 miles per hour with 110 mile per hour winds and a pressure of 28.32 inches, a Category 2 hurricane.

But by noon of the 23rd we had a Category 4 hurricane! Winds were 135 miles per hour, pressure had dropped to 27.46 inches, and the storm was 330 miles east of Miami, still moving west at 16 miles per hour.

By 1415 that same afternoon, Andrew was at his peak with 150 mile per hour winds and 27.23 inches (Andrew was very close to a Category 5 storm). At this point a Hurricane Watch was posted from Titusville south to Vero Beach and Hurricane Warnings covered from Vero Beach south through the keys and up the west coast to Ft. Myers.

By 2100 on August 23rd, Andrew was in the Bahamas 180 miles
east of Miami. Landfall near Miami was predicted for early morning August 24.

Between 0400-0500 on the 24th, Andrew struck the Florida coastline just south of Miami, with sustained winds of 145 miles per hour and recorded gusts of 164 miles per hour, reported by the National Hurricane Center in Coral Gables, before the main radar at the center was destroyed. Gusts to 175 mph were later confirmed.

Andrew crossed the state with 125 mile per hour winds and a forward speed of 18 miles per hour, still moving west, and a Category 3 storm now. Pressure was 27.91 inches. Some recorded gusts in miles per hour were:

- Palm Beach International Airport 54
- Goodyear Blimp Base at Pompano 100
- Miami International Airport 115
- National Hurricane Center 163
- Turkey Point Power Point 163
- Turkey Point Nuclear Power Plant 160
- Fowey Rocks (Biscayne Bay) 169

(U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, 1993.)

Once into the warm waters of the Gulf, winds returned to 140 miles per hour, or Category 4 again.

By 0600 on the 25th, Andrew was 270 miles southeast of New Orleans, now moving west-northwest at 17 miles per hour. Winds were 140 miles per hour.

At 1300 on the 25th, the storm was 150 miles south of New Orleans moving west-northwest at 16 miles per hour. Winds were still 140 miles per hour and barometric pressure was 27.85 inches.

The storm slowed down to almost stationary 30 miles south-east of Lafayette, Louisiana. Early on the 26th of August, winds near new Iberia, Louisiana, were reported to be 115 miles per hour with gusts to 160 miles per hour.

Landfall occurred between New Iberia and Lafayette, Louisiana, as a Category 3 hurricane.

By noon on the 26th Andrew was downgraded to tropical storm status for the first time since the 22nd of August. Near Baton Rouge, Louisiana, there was up to 10 inches of rain and 65 mile per
hour winds, with tornadoes.

By the morning of the 28th, the system was in eastern Tennessee, trying to merge with a cold front, the remains of hurricane Lester, a Pacific hurricane. Andrew finally died out in Pennsylvania on August 29, 1993.

On Sabbatical with Hurricane Andrew

After anchoring their 40-foot sailboat (named Sabbatical) in Manatee Bay in the upper Keys, Dr. and Mrs. Stephens took refuge in a friend’s home in Southwest Miami.

The following is an eye witness account written by Lois Stephens of Melbourne Beach, Florida.

Sleep was difficult, but I think we all managed to sleep some. About 2:00 AM it started. The wind was howling and shutters were banging. The five of us all crowded into the hallway, just like the usual pre-hurricane instructions stated. Fortunately, Karen had put out candles for us. So far so good. The lights went out, the rain started. The wind got many times stronger and the house almost shivered. The force became so great we ran almost panicky into the bathrooms. There were two, both without windows. Ron and Karen headed for one, Lee, Tom and I the other. We sat on lawn chairs, nestled close together, in the dark with our eyes closed. We opened the door only long enough to get a small votive candle, but the force became too great to open it. The wind grew more ferocious. Suddenly, the windows began to blow out, one at a time, fiercely smashing against the tiled floors. One huge crash I assumed to be the TV, but it was the newly purchased computer. Glass kept smashing. I had been aware for some time of my two root canals. It was strange, but the teeth had piercing pain. I remembered once before being in an airplane with inadequate pressure regulation and experiencing the same pain. Then it hit. The drop in pressure in the house was so intense it caused pain in your ears and you had to keep swallowing, something like when a plane takes off, but much, much worse. We tried to open the bathroom door, but the force was too great. So three and two of us sat in silence, eyes closed, waiting for the horror to end. The small door to the “attic” storage space blew in and the rain followed. Water crept in around our feet, and I had a dread of it rising. But
it did not. Sometime after 6:00, I think, the wind subsided substantially, and we had nerve enough to leave our sanctuary. The house was all but demolished. The bed where Tom and I had slept a few hours before was full of glass and wet soggy debris. (My emergency bag of clothing, etc. was waterproof, but I had left it unzipped so it was likewise wet and full of junk.) The newly tiled (and in 3 rooms, newly carpeted) floors were covered with roof shingles, nails, much glass of all sizes, furniture, books, and of course, with a couple of inches of water. Ceiling fans still clung to their mountings, but under each, the light globes were full of dirty water. Water oozed from holes in the walls where Karen's (she is an artist) newly framed tropical paintings had been hung. Paint was stripped from the walls. The carport (a sturdy "permanent" one) and door overhang were gone. The new roof was without shingles, and had gaping holes. A look outside showed that all trees and fences were down. It was, of course, light now, so being cautious but ignoring some of the warnings we had heard, we walked around the neighborhood. It was sickening, horrifying. Not one house had escaped major damage. Trees, even the largest, were sprawled over houses, cars and streets. Some cars had only broken windows and dents (as did our friend's), and some were blown about and overturned. One had burned from a fallen power line. Not just the power lines were down, but heavy duty power poles were also broken. Except for no smoke or fires at this point, it must have been what a "bombed out" area looks like in wartime. Miraculously, quick checks with neighbors found no one injured. Since roads in every direction were impassable, any hope of getting back to what might or might not be left of our boat were given up for the present.

...LATER...

Highways were somewhat clear by this time, except for some questionable power lines. Trees and large downed poles lined the way. What was most amazing, though, was that literally thousands of cars had found their way to the same area where we were. Traffic was next to impossible, lights and signs inoperative, and cars in extremely questionable condition. We'll never know the number of traffic accidents that day alone.

We passed the hotel, the Holiday Inn, where we had tried so desperately to get a room. It was standing, but barely, with all
windows, balconies, etc. blown away. We passed houses with walls only and houses without any walls. Devastation went on for miles. We passed lines of hundreds of people waiting for water. Huge trucks had apparently been placed there at some point to distribute bottled water. One truck had blown uselessly on its side.

Eventually we got to our boat - it was not where we had left it, of course, but it looked good and was tightly nestled back in a grove of mangroves, aground. Miraculously, even the little Zodiac dinghy was still tied to it, snuggled alongside like a loyal puppy nestled against its master. A window was out, glass was everywhere and branches were entwined in some lines. A stanchion (Tom says) was out and leaves and red mud covered one side of the boat. It was beautiful - we were ecstatic. The carpet was wet - the galley was soaked and covered with glass, but everything else was as we left it.

That night, Tom and I were alone in the middle of Manatee Bay, the most beautiful anchorage of our entire sailing experience. The sky was clear and bursting with stars with no electric lights to distract from their beauty. There were no airplanes, distant cars, trains or any noises. The most amazing phenomena was taking place in the water around us. We had seen luminous fish on occasion, but we saw intensely brilliant green fish swimming around the boat. We dropped a line in the water and swirled it around and it left a trail of light behind it, somewhat like a comet. If we splashed the water, we splashed thousands of tiny lights. (All of this, of course, sent us later to our reference books to see what we had discovered.) We were so fortunate, so thankful, and we sipped our champagne.

...THE NEXT DAY...

We were stopped by the Miami Police in a huge inflatable boat and advised we were on the Coast Guard "list" (missing persons and boats) and to "call home."