

Sandy

Glyn Dowden

A creative historical fiction, vaguely a memoir, but based on truth.

For days there had been voices, urgent voices, panicked voices, brimstone on the tele, Sandy is coming, Sandy is coming. Hide, run, pray, have faith, bring out the dead, bring out the guns, where are the helicopters, don't despair the end is almost nigh.

Many scientists believe that our current human activity in modern society is causing climate change, while nonbelievers say that such ideas are nonsense and that so far no connection has been proven. My fear is, that by the time all evidence has been accumulated, it will be too late.

Hurricane Sandy was a tropical cyclone and with winds spanning a diameter of 1,100 miles, it was the largest Atlantic hurricane on record. Sandy, developing from a tropical wave in the Caribbean Sea on October 22, 2012 quickly gained strength and was soon upgraded to Tropical Storm Sandy. The storm ravaged long suffering Haiti killing 54 people moved slowly northward, gradually intensified and became a hurricane on October 24th. That day Sandy made landfall near Kingston Jamaica killing 69 people. The following Monday it ravaged the East coast of the United States eating away at its coastline and hurling a record-breaking 13-foot surge of seawater at New York City knocking-out electric power to more than 7.5 million homes.

We were trapped in our second home near the beach in Plymouth, Massachusetts. We had gone there to attend a Saturday night neighborhood fancy dress Halloween Party. In keeping with the theme

I had dressed and painted my face to feature as a Dark and Stormy cocktail, Magdalen was a Rum and Coke.

Being convinced that the storm was going to attack our region, the very next day I had Magdalen blow-up the rubber dinghy, she's better at that sort of thing than me, but I think even she had very little puff left in her lungs afterwards. She lay, yellow faced on the basement floor and I considered giving her the kiss of life. As her color returned to normal, I assured her that the effort was worthwhile because now, just in case we needed one, we had an escape vehicle. Mind you, I was pretty sure the dinghy would not hold more than one person - we'd figure that one out later. Monday night we went to bed with our flippers on and made sure that snorkels were within easy reach on the bedside tables.

Fortunately we did not have to use them. I threw the cat out of the upstairs window every now and then, just to test the depth of the water. She's quite a good swimmer for her age. Of course food and water was the real problem, I think we were down to a tin of sardines, three salted crackers and half a bottle of Magdalen's red wine and so I knew that she was approaching panic level. Me, I wasn't so concerned, and thought we could handle it. After all I used to starve during business sorties, sometimes going without breakfast or lunch in the wilds of Indonesia and deserts of the Middle East. Needless to say she was not impressed with that speech. But I digress. We had Magdalen's Subura Forester outside, gassed up and poised like a tiger and as we all know they were built to cross rapids and rivers in Japan. So, while we tried to keep the water out of our wellies and listened to the nearby call of killer whales in the ocean, that night,

under an old oil lamp, on a piece of bleached parchment we found in the basement, or was it my undershirt, just in case the house sailed off into Cape Cod Bay, we confidently mapped out our escape. And we realized that there it was in a nutshell, our outward bound afternoon survival course that we had attended years before, was beginning to pay off.

The next day we had the feeling of 'so far, so good'. However, in case satellite connections were to go down, I also popped a note into a bottle for my extended family living far away in Wales. A last hasty instruction to them before my cell phone battery ran down was to tell them that they should keep a sharp look out for a floating ginger beer bottle which, by my maritime reckoning, should enter the English channel by early Thursday morning Greenwich Mean time. By mid day we were tearing through winding roads and wind swept highways and could almost feel the clutching, grasping hands of the howling monster as we fled Plymouth, hoping that disaster would not catch -up with us. As I grimly bent over the steering wheel, snatching anxious glances at the low clouds in front and threatening storm behind, while eating a dunkin donut and pulling on a decaf coffee, we both muttered our prayers and desperately hurtled home, one step ahead of Sandy. Then, finally, having eluded hysterical weather forecasters and doomsday prognosticators, both of us being of sound mind and limb we crossed the border into the welcoming arms of Connecticut. Was this it? After so much pain and hardship was this our salvation? Plunging on further into the unknown, with my private thoughts of Rambo and Magdalen's cold raven like merciless eye (it was the only

one I could see) staring menacingly ahead, we steeled ourselves against anything or anyone trying to stop us.

Nearing our home, with more than a little trepidation we pattered up the mountain but could not help noticing the silent, lifeless houses standing like large, cold, grey monoliths. Something was up. Sure enough, as we rushed into the sanctuary of our living room - no electricity. Searing fear tore through my mind, what had I done? It seemed that we had travelled from the shore of Galilee only to find the desert of Egypt and a pox was about to descend upon our house. And so there we sat; marooned, no lights, heat, running water or toilet flush. Life was fading away and almost over. I dug a hole in the back yard for Magdalen's daily bodily functions, after all, having been brought up in Raglan Street I figured she was used to outside lavatories. Mind you she evened-up the score by rationing the toilet paper. That led me to wondering whether the newsprint ink from the Financial Times would ever be removed from my arse. Of course, with food running low, any wandering bear, deer or wild turkey was quickly taken down, gutted and rolling over a fire on a spit before you had time to say Glen Beck or Mr and Mrs Obama. Not surprisingly up on the mountain there was the usual talk about cannibalism. Personally I didn't take much notice of it, even though the odd shoe had been found here and there.

Magdalen had a few bad turns; screaming, tearing out part of her hair and running herself against the wall. Of course the only way to handle this was for me to throw her onto the floor on her back, pin her down

and slap her back and forth across the face until her eyes stopped rolling. I then wrapped her in a blanket and carefully shoved her into the hall for a few hours.

Although I have heard that this experience can only make you stronger, I'm telling you, it was not easy being cut off from civilization. Of course the cat went missing after two days, needless to say it's obvious what happened to her. But I must admit, we had our eye on our next door neighbor's spaniel, but I wasn't sure. Even though he is blind, deaf, farts like a pig and has lost all sense of orientation, it is the scabs on his face and ears that put me off, although Magdalen said that if she used enough curry powder, he would taste fine.

Shadows flickered, the candles dimmed. We had played our last hand of Bananagram and could not help but wonder whether we were going to survive the night. We were going into the fourth day when suddenly, the lights came on. The Lord God, 'electricity', had saved us.