

Worsening Hurricanes Are Driving Families from their Homes

Sarah Renée Oźlański has worked on boats for a third of her life. She could literally see the sea levels rise before her eyes. After losing a friend during Hurricane Sandy, she moved from the Northeastern United States to Florida.

In 2019, Hurricane Dorian largely spared Florida but devastated the Bahamas. That's when Sarah Renée got a request for help from a new mother named Natandra Lewis. The two recently reflected on Natandra's evacuation and on their friendship that ensued.

Transcript:

Sarah Oźlański: Can you tell me about the day that Hurricane Dorian struck?

Natandra Lewis: I remember I looked outside, and I saw water coming in the house from all directions and through our hurricane shutter doors. That's when I really got alerted.

I just remember all of us came out through the kitchen window because all the doors were jammed.

When I stepped outside, the water was by my chest area. I just was mainly focused on trying to hold this baby up above my head.

The emergency guys, they were able to help and carry me and my family to the shelter.

Everything that I knew growing up was taken away. But I have my son so I still give thanks for life.

Sarah: How did you escape the Bahamas?

Natandra: I took the relief cruise that offered their help to bring Bahamians to the States. A lot of people on board that was helping and making sure you were okay, but I'm trying to figure out *where am I going to live after this?*

Sarah, when I messaged you, you answered back, and I felt the genuine connection there. My gut feeling told me that you may have been able to understand what was going on with me.

Sarah: I remember that morning getting up early, going down to the cruise ship. I didn't know what to expect 'cause I didn't know what you looked like other than a couple of photos that you'd sent me. And then when we did finally connect, you had a big smile on your face and Olan was snoozin' hard.

Natandra: What made you want to help?

Sarah: I was not prepared for what it would be like to go through hurricanes in Florida, and it became really stressful every year, going through Irma and Matthew.

And I remember seeing how Dorian sat on top of the Bahamas for multiple days and just thinking, oh my gosh. My heart sank for your country and everybody that had to go through that. Having had previous experience with hurricanes myself, I knew I would help you in whatever way I could.

How is it for you living in an area that is very much affected by climate change?

Natandra: You know, I've been going through it my whole life, but usually our hurricanes are strong winds that take off the roof or blow down trees. But this was definitely a change with the flooding. So I do feel that they are getting worse, and we need to be more prepared.

Sarah: It definitely made me think more about what can be done for future situations like this. The help all came from community efforts and then just a lot of individuals. That shows the goodness of everyday people, but our governments really do need to step it up.

Natandra: The little impact that you have can affect someone in such a positive way.

Sarah: How you guys came into my life, that's pretty unique. That's not a normal way I think most people meet each other. I'm so happy that I met you and Olander.

Natandra: And I'm grateful and thankful that I found you.