

Thisa and Thata, or 'Oil for the Lamps of China'

by Norma Hansburg

"God twice destroyed the world. Once by fire and once by flood"
- The Gospel According to Luke

Luke was referring to Gods warning to Lot and to Noah. Somehow it seems appropriate on this day, Sept. 11, 2005, to remember that the legends of the past are always with us. The destruction of the cities of Sodom and Gommorah by fire and the great flood, which swept away all living creatures except two of each kind, have been constantly repeated.

These legends are not only in our Bible but in all religions. They are based on physical events that actually occurred. They occur when mankind gets too lazy, too complacent, too rich or too decadent, to take care of things properly. It would seem that one warning is never enough.

Hurricane Katrina is the worst natural disaster of its kind we have ever had in this country. Despite 9/11 nobody appeared to be prepared for it. There were many reasons that it was so destructive. Some of them have been going on for a century; others for the last few years; and still others were based on failure to take immediate action. This catastrophe is going to affect all of us.

The City, when it was originally settled, was not below sea level. The old town and the French quarter are above sea level. Over the last 100 years, as the city expanded, they drained the wetlands and built below sea level. They erected levees to protect the cities and towns along the gulf and the Mississippi from rising tide-waters. For the past five years, the government, despite the surplus from the previous administration, cut the levee repair budget in half.

The warming of the waters in the Gulf itself added to the buildup of the storms fury. The Gulf is filled with offshore oil rigs which could have contributed to the warming, but points a finger directly at the real problem: OIL.

Due to the problem in the Middle East, one-third of the Louisiana Guard and its equipment, including amphibious equipment, were in Iraq. Due to 9/11 FEMA, which had been incredible in its response to previous emergencies, had been placed under the control of HOMELAND SECURITY. The City of New Orleans had been working on a disaster plan called PAM, but it was one month away from completion.

Because the plan was incomplete, there was a great deal of confusion and the evacuation centers had no emergency generators or medical equipment. School buses and other public transportation were not used to remove people from the city, but left in parking lots that soon flooded. This confusion was seen on every level, all the way up to the highest office in the land.

The political war between the two major parties, between federal and local governments, added to the problem.

The total population of those three states is 12 million – 3 million in Mississippi, an area that was actually hit the hardest. One-half million live in New Orleans, which was the largest city on the Gulf Coast. The population of that city was 70 percent African American, most of them living at or below the poverty level. By contrast, the two big surrounding states of Texas and Florida rank second and fourth in population in America. In fact, the population of Florida is almost as big as that of New York. That means that those three states do not have much political clout in a Nation that is rapidly approaching 300 million.

I got involved because I was entered in the shows in Monroe, Louisiana, over the Labor Day weekend. Monroe is halfway between Shreveport and Jackson. It's a nice Cluster; six shows in

four days. The Specialties were both scheduled for the evening Saturday and Sunday night. They always offer a good panel of judges. This was no exception. They drew very well.

So here we are. Good judges, good entries, a good dog, in good coat and condition, a good handler (Mike Sherman), first-class hotel reservations. What could be more perfect? I was looking forward to a relaxing drive along some of the most beautiful highways in America and some nice visits with old friends, not to mention the chance to pick up needed Majors.

When the storm warnings began, I watched closely. By Sunday, it looked like they might call the shows off, but when the storm bypassed New Orleans, it looked like we were going to be in the clear. Monday night, I called several people, including Mike, and as far as anyone knew the shows would go on. Tuesday morning, I called Onofrio and the shows were still on. After all, the whole problem was 200 miles south of where the shows were being held. Mike called AKC at noon and the shows were still on. Breathing a sigh of relief, I set off with Jack. Little did I know.

Tuesday was uneventful, as I drove with my cell phone plugged in. By nightfall, I had reached the Virginia-Tennessee Border. I fed and walked the dog and fell into bed. I had planned to make some calls, but did not have the energy. There was no sign of trouble anywhere on Wednesday - no raising of gas prices, no talk of trouble, as I drove through Tennessee and Georgia into Alabama. Nothing unusual at all. Until I arrived at Route 20.

The highway was littered with blown tires but nothing else unusual. One piece hit my side-view mirror and broke the glass. There were no military trucks or uniforms or anything but normal traffic. As I approached the Mississippi Border I began to look for a gas station. Lots of stations were out of gas but otherwise had no problems and no one said a word about any trouble. In fact, they directed me to a gas station that had lower prices than I had been paying up north. So far so good.

Then I crossed the Mississippi line and everything changed.

There were trees down everywhere. There were no motel rooms in Meriden. No power in any of the small towns I passed. Even a large Holiday Inn was dark. People were just sitting around staring at the walls. No candles, no flashlights, no bottled water. It seemed like a dream. I called the Holiday Inn in Monroe. If I kept driving, I figured maybe they could take me a day early. They could not and said nothing about the shows being canceled. I drove on to Jackson, where I got a room at the Super Eight. Despite a sign that said 'No Pets Allowed,' they seemed to have a dozen dog people staying there. Once again, I fell into bed and slept for 11 hours.

Thursday morning dawned bright and clear. I had a good breakfast put the dog on Immodium AD and switched his water to bottled, as well as mine. I took off leisurely toward Monroe, which was only two hours away. The hotel was gorgeous.

"Are you by any chance here for the dog shows," they asked. "Of course I am," I said.

"THEY CANCELLED THEM!"

"When?"

"They told us yesterday. The place they were holding them was turned into an Evacuation Center."

I turned the car around and drove straight through until I got home. It took 22 hours. I passed the sign that said "EVACUATION CENTER," but there were no cars or people there. In 24 hours, the price of gas had gone up 75 cents a gallon. It got higher as I got further north. When I arrived home, I had a dozen messages. I made one call and in 10 minutes there were two dog people on my doorstep. Jack barked at both of them.

What did I learn from this experience?

The AKC emergency rules were made 100 million people ago. AKC and Dog Show Superintendents are closed on weekends. They need a central emergency hotline. One serious injury, one death, one major lawsuit could wipe them out. One person has to make the decisions, not a dozen different clubs. We were not the only Specialty that weekend. The Chinese Shar Pei National was also being held there. If things are serious enough to warrant closing down all of the airports, they are serious enough to close down the shows.

We were lucky. The storm could have come a week later.

There isn't a Dog Show in the world that is worth a single human life. THE SHOW DOES NOT HAVE TO GO ON. It should not take that long to decide to cancel any show. It should not take that long to make any judgment call. Not ever.

ADDENDUM

A portion of this article originally appeared The Review in 2005.

The area referred to in this story grows sugar cane. In Brazil, all cars are driving on ethanol made of sugar cane and it is half the price of gasoline. I thought that might have much more meaning now.

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