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Victims of Past Hurricanes Share Lessons Learned

Ask for the Help You Need

Denise Dorman was eight-and-a-half months pregnant when Hurricane Ivan hit her house in Shalimar, Fla., on Sept. 15, 2004.

"I can't even begin to explain to you how terrifying it was," she says. "It was night, so we couldn't see what was going on. We could just hear things hitting our house."

The wind had ripped the roof right off their two-story house, although she and her husband, Dave Dorman, didn't know it at the time. Hunkered down in the living room on the first floor, they used water coolers for buckets as water poured through a hole in the ceiling, unaware how much bigger the problem really was.

They wouldn't be able to live in the house again until four months — and \$61,000 — later.

The Dormans were fortunate because Denise's parents had just bought a home nearby in Fort Walton Beach, Fla. Ivan hadn't harmed even a shingle on that house, so the Dormans moved right in and stayed until the middle of January.

If her parents hadn't bought their retirement home, the Dormans would have had to head up to Denise's hometown in Illinois and stay with them there, she says.

Although fortunate to have a place to stay — especially since FEMA had only given them \$400 for lodging — the Dormans still were overcome with anxiety at the prospect of rebuilding their home with their first child on the way. They quickly discovered the old cliché that laughter is the best medicine, and they spent hours watching "The Daily Show," Comedy Central and the "Seinfeld" DVD box set.

"Once the baby arrived, our attention completely shifted," Denise said.

Instead of worrying about their house, they focused on the excitement of new parenthood.

But repair costs were skyrocketing, particularly with their contractor dragging his feet. The Dormans both are self-employed — she has a copywriting business called Write Brain Media and he's an artist. They got \$28,000 from home insurance, and then they had to drain their savings account and get creative for the rest.

"We were desperate," she says.

One of Dave's artist friends, Steve Smith, set up a Web site to raise money for them. He asked their other friends in the artist community to donate artwork to be sold on the site, with all proceeds going to the Dormans.

In coming up with that final \$3,000, Denise learned a lesson she wants to pass along to all hurricane victims.

"Don't be ashamed to reach out to anyone you can for help," she says. "Don't put your pride before your needs."

The Dormans were extremely lucky — lucky that not only that they had friends and family members of means who were able to provide them with assistance, but lucky that they were willing to ask for and accept help. For those in need who find it difficult to ask for help even when they're in dire straits, Butterworth offers this advice.

If you have trouble asking for help, you have to make a deal with yourself," he says. "What you need right now is a helping hand, and you will repay it when you can — not necessarily monetarily. It could be by doing something to help that person out in some way."