

# HURRICANE KATE LETS THE KEYS OFF EASY

**Miami Herald – November 21 1985**  
**Written By Rosemary Harold**

## Key West's Houseboats Hit Hardest

With some notable exceptions, Hurricane Kate was kind to the Keys.

More than 15,000 people were evacuated safely to the mainland. Another 1,500 took refuge in Monroe County's 12 hurricane shelters. The winds, which hit 104 mph in Key West but blew steadily at only about 55 mph, took down power lines throughout the county. But wind helped destroyed just three trailers and three houseboats, as far as officials knew Wednesday.

That's a bit less impressive when the home is your own, however. Tom Carr, a civilian employee of the U.S. Navy, surveyed the tilted, waterlogged houseboat he rented for three months and jested with the glum looking owner, Jose Posada. "Want to have a garage sale, Jose?"

A few feet from Carr, fisherman Rick Booth was looking down at a floating remnant of his 36-foot boat "Heart of Black," wrecked in an accident with amateur boaters eight months ago.

A friend bought the partly salvaged boat and towed it to a neighboring inlet, where it was wrecked again by Hurricane Kate. Tuesday morning, Booth stepped out on debris to check a small skiff he owned – and realized he was standing on his old boat.

"I always knew that boat was haunted," he said.

Key West's Houseboat Row sustained the most serious damage in town, said Monroe County's Civil Defense head, Billy Wagner. He headed the Emergency Operations Center at the courthouse. At one point the center, with its emergency generator, was the only bright spot along eerie, blacked-out Whitehead Street Tuesday night. About 12,000 of City Electric System's 18,000 home and business customers lost power Monday, spokesman Ben Martin said.

Crews worked through the night to restore electricity, but company officials estimated 1,800 to 2,700 would be left in the dark until this afternoon, Martin said. A large power pole that crashed across North Roosevelt Boulevard Tuesday night was replaced Wednesday.

The Key West Master Host Resort, also on North Roosevelt, had its aluminum roof sheeting scalped off by the wind, but no one was hurt and the hotel remained open, manager Hans Restuccia said.

Hurricane Kate apparently took no lives. Key Wester Joseph Hemburger suffered the only known serious injury in the Lower Keys when he fell from a ladder while reading his house for the storm. He was taken to Florida Keys Memorial Hospital for treatment and released.

The sheriff's department and Key West police had busy but uneventful nights, spokesmen said. Roads were open, although city workers kept sightseers off South Roosevelt Boulevard while work crews cleaned up tons of seaweed.

By 2:00PM, traffic caused by returning Keys' residents slowed to normal, Major Richard Rothm of the sheriff's department, said.

Only one minor traffic accident was reported during the evacuation, Wagner said. Traffic congestion did slow northbound cars Monday; the usual 2 ½-hour trip from Key West to South Dade took up to six hours. But the county's only link to the mainland was open throughout the storm.

The Keys were lucky the hurricane's eye skirted the islands 85 miles to the south, Wagner said, though he praised citizens for responding quickly to official warnings. "People should realize the sustained winds were quite a bit below the 75 mph winds we expected. They shouldn't think they went through a major hurricane."