

AFTERMATH – TALLAHASSEE BRAVES THE STORM

Tallahassee Democrat – November 23 1985

For Tallahassee, Thanksgiving came a week early. Despite the fierce pounding that Hurricane Kate gave the area, there was no loss of life here directly related to the storm and few serious injuries.

That's especially remarkable in view of the hundreds of trees that fell, sometimes smashing into homes and cars; the power lines that were severed, becoming potential deathtraps; the rain-slicked streets and the failed traffic lights that made driving an adventure.

The loss of so many huge street-sheltering oak trees – a Tallahassee trademark – and towering pines was tragic, but more trees will grow to replace them. And damaged homes can be repaired. Lives cannot be restored.

And as it always seems to do, natural disaster brings out the best in many People. Neighbors helped neighbors prepare for the late-arriving Kate, and shared news and coffee in impromptu morning gatherings before pitching in to clean up.

Drivers displayed unusual courtesy as they crept through major intersections unaided by traffic lights.

City and county crews worked even during the storm itself to keep streets and roads passable. Police officers and sheriff's deputies put in long, hard hours. The American Red Cross again did an excellent job of handling refugees from coastal areas where evacuation had been ordered.

Despite the lack of lights and power to operate their cash registers, many grocery, hardware and convenience stores opened their doors so shoppers could get necessary supplies.

Some people took on unusual responsibilities and handled them well. WBGM-FM 99 comes to mind. The pop station, for hours the only Tallahassee radio station on the air, dropped its music and spent the entire night Thursday and a good portion on Friday as public-service station. When power failed in the area, FM 99 became the only link to news of the storm for many people. The station gladly shared its airtime with weathermen Mike Rucker and Mark Pinto, Channel 6, and Conner Vernon, Channel 27. Messages were relayed from law-enforcement, civil-defense and other government agencies. School and work closings were reported – and later, open stores and services.

City workers are laboring – with help of crews from elsewhere – to restore power, but the job is a mammoth one. It is not just a matter of splicing wires; Kate snapped many poles like matchsticks.

Much of the city was still in darkness Friday night, making dining by candlelight a necessity rather than a luxury for many Tallahasseeans. Inconvenient yes, but there is a plus in all this. With the TV blank, there is a time to rediscover family and – with darkness all around – the wonder of a starlit sky. Look up tonight. If it is clear, the number of stars may amaze you.

And there is something special in the sky now. If you have binoculars, you may be able to see Halley's Comet. Try looking in the eastern sky an hour after sunset or an hour before sunrise.

Haley's Comet won't be back for 76 years; if we're lucky we won't see another hurricane before then either.