

Lighthouse Point Estates Newsletter

PUNTA ARENA | LA RIBERA | EAST CAPE | BAJA CALIFORNIA SUR, MEXICO

OCTOBER 2014

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A WORD ABOUT THE PRESIDENT

LPE has flourished under Ruben's leadership during 2014. In addition to being our President, Ruben shouldered the role of PM. Please remember that this year we have not paid a Property Manager to do the many day-to-day, weekly & monthly things that need doing OR to have a mutually agreed upon goal that would include a 10-year vision or 20-year goal.

To recap his **FIRST 6 MONTHS**:

+ He made the last water payment (\$34, 373 p) to Oomsapas for a zero balance, driving out & meeting with Sr Flores (LR manager) each time, nurturing a LPE relationship for us to build on.

+ He hired Viveros de la Baja Company for \$14,500usd per year for LPE landscaping.

+ He hired Alfonso Parra to do fence repairs and replacement for \$295p per pole, including bracing and caps.

+ He started LPEs own networking with LR and the mayor for \$500usd per year. (traditional gift-giving)

+ He initiated road scraping for \$130usd per road, rotating among dump and beach roads to LR and inside LPE subdivision.

SECOND 6 MONTHS:

+ He secured Phase 2 estimate for water repairs by Oomsapas for \$7130usd (IVA not included.) Other phases to follow.

+ He negotiated with Oomsapas a 'tip only' (200p) payment procedure for fixing emergency water leaks and plumbing issues. No more expensive private plumbers.

+ He is overseeing guard house remodel - paint & brick-in one window (\$4500p), contracting for 3 new metal doors & 1 window grate to be built (\$11,000p), driving to Home Depot to purchase A/C split (\$700approx) plus installing, and ordering lockable file cabinets (\$200) for LPE Board meetings to be held and safe storage of all documents.

+ He completed ARC translation into Spanish and attempted to register CC&Rs in San Jose.

+ He had Notario meetings with #1 and #10 to get more information. Excellent, fluent Spanish language skills required.

+ He oversaw new security procedures, road maintenance, bill paying, emergency Oomsapas repairs, & general, daily hole plugging.

+ He has been ‘on call’ to all owners at any and all times, to answer questions, interpret complications, help solve problems.

Ruben, our LPE President & acting PM, NOT an LPE owner or investor, lives here and has observed each and every transaction involving LPE money with utmost care and respect, always getting several proposals before signing a contract. He has followed up on all contracts and completed jobs to make sure they are proper & worthy of payment. He has devoted countless hours & spent his own money and gasoline to performing tasks. He has not charged LPE one cent. If ever there was an example of an ideal PM, Ruben is it. If there are weeds that are not cleaned out yet, or bumps in the road, please be patient with us as your Board always does the best we can & will continue to do so.

Perhaps if there is any particular idea or situation an owner would like changed, please submit 3 proposals to the Board and we can all work toward a resolution.



MEMBER AT LARGE NEWS

Joyce attended, along with other Homeowners, the President, Ruben, and the Treasurer, Becky, at a June 30th meeting, which was a presentation by Don Harris on the remaining developer’s interest in LPE. She reported that Don Harris stated there were over 100 lots still in the developer’s name. They were sold, but the new owners’ did not put the property in a trust and have not paid taxes or HOA dues. He stated the developer will properly notify these owners (3 “timed” notices from a Notario), then these lots will be sold by the developer. Don stated that when the new owners put the property in a trust, the HOA can collect back dues. The developer is asking the HOA to forgo the penalties on the back dues, which he would pay without penalty. Board members attending the meeting asked the developer to pay dues when the property reverts back to the developer, not until he sells the properties. The Board needs to vote to waive penalties.

Don Harris, also stated that the developer would be paying the back dues owing on the condos to the HOA. The Treasurer confirms that those dues were collected. Don Harris also said the developer will move forward to build out the remaining condos and put them all on the market to sell. The board has asked the developer to remove the fences which does not conform to the CCR’s and or replace it with one that is approved by the Architectural Committee. Don Harris stated that the developer is anxious to complete the project at LHPE and wants to work with the HOA to that end.

Submitted by Joyce Harczo, Member at Large.



TREASURER’S REPORT

2013-14 LPE BUDGET REPORT

The following annual budget report contains fiscal information from January 2014 unto September 30, 2014, when Becky Talley, volunteered to assume interim Treasurer’s responsibilities due to the previous elected Treasurer resignation. Detailed expenditures prior to that time are not part of this report except as reflected in total amounts expended and reported funds-on-hand.

The budget report for the past fiscal year overall to the date of September 30, 2014, is positive since LPE is in sound fiscal condition. January 1, 2014, there was \$101,231 (USD) in our bank account. As of this fiscal report covering until September 30, 2014, there is \$150,164 (USD). So, we are showing a positive balance increase of nearly \$49,000 (USD). The projected operational expenses for the remainder of the year is, December 30, 2014, is \$36, 276 (USD).

Major expenses this year in the report are for water (Oomsapas), which includes paying off a water debit settlement amounting over several years, and the cost of providing water to our common areas and leakage of water lines. The sum total amount paid to date to Oomsapas is approximately \$26,000 (USD). The final debt settlement payment for unpaid water was \$13,749 (USD). The common area plus ongoing leakage is \$12,208 (USD). The ongoing leakage of water will be addressed in the coming year by making repairs to the water system in Phases 2,3,4 and 5. Phase 1 has already been repaired.

The next major cost is Security. There was an increase in security this year due to the Mexican government increased taxes and social security. The cost for security January through September was \$33,080 (USD) and by year end will sum total \$44,216 (USD). The Board had sent out proposals for possible new security providers receiving various prices, however, in the end decided to remain with the current Security provider for various reasons, one being cost containment.

The past Administrator was dismissed by the LPE Board of Directors for various reasons including consideration of his submission of resignation to the last Board. Subsequently, there are cost-savings resulting from not paying his salary and is one reason for the increased cash-on-hand in the LPE account. There were no more payments to the past Administrator as of January 2014 to be reported.

The Board is planning to hire a Property Manager this coming year to oversee daily operations, including possibly security and other necessary activities and responsibilities vital to LPE. However, the fiscal transition from last year to this year has caused some delay in doing so. A future property manager (PM) will cost about \$2,000 (USD) per month/\$24,000 annual (USD). So, since January there has been a windfall gain by our LPE President doing minimal and necessary property manager tasks at no cost.

Professional legal fees paid since January 2014 to September 2014 is \$7,322 (USD). There were various legal services provided that simply had to be paid. Typically legal fees annually for LPE are budgeted for about \$10,000 (USD). The Board of Directors is trying to contain legal costs to a minimum required.

This year the Board of Directors has hired a new accountant from Los Barriles from a major well respected firm. The accountant was hired in July and has served us well. The person assigned to us has over 20 years of experience and teaches MX tax law to other accountants and attorneys. We are paying \$400 (USD) per month for accounting services. We had to replace our last accountant, who worked for our past Administrator, so again we our benefiting from not having to pay an accountant for several months whose work was done by our interim Treasurer (Becky Talley).

Landscaping and maintenance makes-up most the remaining expenditures. Landscaping per month is \$1,160 /\$13,920 annually (USD). Given the hurricanes impact (Norbert and Odile) there were tremendous number of fences that were knocked down and had to be repaired. Fences repairs were \$10,696 (USD). These costs were contained by selecting someone who provided the best price, did reliable work in the past for us, and his work came with a guarantee.

There were other miscellaneous costs such as a Notary, bank charges, roads, electricity that are not much in terms of individual billings, yet add up. Road costs have been contained by several thousands of dollars since our President Ruben Megia visited the Mayor to have the City provide road grading at the cost of gas and some gratuity. This offer had been worked out before with the Mayor by a previous LPE President and Jaime Laguna, past Property Manager, however, failed to be given attention to by our past administrator, resulting in unnecessary private contracting of road grading for the last couple of years. In the past the annual budget for road grading has been \$8,500 (USD). We currently paid less \$1,000 (USD) for the City to do road grading.

In summary, the annual budget report this year has reflected a Board of Directors that has exercised frugality much due to the transition from dismissing a past Administrator and having to get-by with a President and interim-treasurer to do duties and tasks otherwise paid for. In addition, the water settlement has been paid off to Oomsapas stopping ending the extra billings this year. Road repair costs have been contained. Unanticipated costs have mainly been from the hurricanes. Entering October with \$150,000 (USD) on-hand with an anticipated estimate of another \$36,000 (USD) expenditures to be made before the end of the year should make the property owners at LPE be confident that we are in sound financial position for the coming year.

I am glad that I could contribute my service to our LPE HOA and submitting the following annual report.

Sincerely,

Rebecca (Becky) Talley,
Interim Treasurer



VP STATUS

Due to the resignation of the Vice-President several months ago, we will be voting for a new Vice-President at our upcoming November 2014 annual meeting. Dale Gardner is our candidate.



SECRETARY SUBMISSION

During the AGM this Nov 8th, HOA will be voting for 2 new Board members: Dale Gardner for VP and Melanie Williamson for MAL. MaryJane Keehn has withdrawn her VP candidacy and will continue with ARC responsibilities. We will also vote for 4 new substitute Board member positions: Jim Hale for substitute MAL and Mary Jane Keehn for substitute secretary. We still need candidates for substitute Treasurer and substitute VP. We hope we have more volunteers in order to have a full slate.

There is now a 2014 Minutes book, compiled and available for all owners to read whenever they are here (only one copy.) It will be kept with all LPE HOA paperwork in the back office/safe at the guard gate. There is a room to sit and read LPE paperwork and all copies and original documents should be returned to the metal cabinets & locked when this reading is finished.

We are considering issues that make a difference to LPE's future. Your one vote can make the difference. It is important if not attending the AGM in November, please send your proxy (with 2 witness signatures) and MXID or copy of your passport to a trusted owner/friend or to a Board member who will attend.



HURRICANE ACCOUNTS

Sept 20, 2014

FINALLY BACK ONLINE

After 6 days with no power I'm finally back up on the internet (at least for now). Having no power was like living on the sailboat many years ago. When the sun goes down, so do you. And when it comes up, so do you. Kinda nice having 11-hr sleep time. But very boring. No light to read by and no internet for distractions. The Kindle worked fine but I had to find someone running a generator for charging. Then my friend Victor reminded me that I had a small 100 watt generator that was in my old motor home 15 years ago. Did I still have it? We dug (literally) thru the bodega and sure enough found it. The damn thing had not been started in probably 10 -12 years. He took it home and he and Victor Jr got the damn thing running.

So tonight I can write a long email to all my friends (if the damn thing keeps running!). While we haven't had any refrigeration and the ice has run out everybody is suffering. Some of the stores ran generators for 4 or 5 days, but all have now quit. So it's been 3 days without a cold beer or ice cubes for my sundowner. We'll not get power back for weeks. Each morning when I go out birding I check that the same power poles are down and nobody is working to fix the situation.

This hurricane took a terrible toll on the birds ... in my yard alone I counted 27 dead birds after the hurricane. Mostly (70%) young Common Ground doves. A high percentage were nestlings and fledglings. While I counted 27 I'm sure there were more. And this is just in my 1/4 acre. The hummers were reduced in half, I went from 8 to 10 hummers down to 5. Same out in the field, bird count seems to be down by about 50%. Most trees, but not all were stripped of leaves and any type of cover. The birds suffered greatly, and it will be a few years until the numbers arise again to pre-storm levels.

This is the fifth hurricane that I've been through and I must say the easiest. Hurricane Lisa in 1976 in La Paz was the worst, (thousands died) although I rode it out at a remote anchorage. Hurricane John was a really bad one. The others I faced at sea and that experience I would not wish on my worst enemy. Just remembering makes me afraid all over again after 25 years.

Enough - how about some bird survivors ...



Sept 27, 2014

RETROCEDER: TROOPER

...Did the blue Toyota pickup truck have any damage from the storm? ...

Hi Bill, it has been unbelievable. I/2 house down my kids lost their room when this happened lot of insecurity I took my kids to La Paz, to my moms and I have to do some things to have them safe 45 cars with windows broken shop was broken into but cars safe I help other people too they lost everything and I did 2 trips to La Paz to bring water x people and food I took donations hardware things happen but is life I drove your truck to La Paz because I didn't have other way to move them hope you understand due situation I used your truck I will compensate the use of your truck I do not like to use costumer cars I aploigize and I will compensate it
Need bed sheets x the girls is a single size beds will be appreciated anything x the beds basicly thanks x your concern really appreciated.



Sept 18, 2014

Hello All, Finally was able to access emails...wow! When I came out of my house at the light of day after the storm it was clear I was not going to be living in the house for a long time. The wind and rain had passed through most of the night. When I made it home during the storm it took me 25 minutes with my cell phone light to find my dog trapped under all the fallen trees in the back yard.

So in the morning I thought my world has changed. It is not about Food, Water and Shelter! I decided the best bet was my restaurant the Cabo Cantina. Samir and I (with profound luck) found and bought the last generator at a plumbing store. From there start looking for gas. We needed to save all the food in our refrigerators and freezers. Half our days were spent looking for gas each day. Buying any water or other needs each day. We were opened and serving 3 meals a day (no menus and no choices). People were walking the streets with no access to food or water (and cold beers.)

Running out of time so let me say this. Things are getting better! The government seems to have control now so some order has come back. Services are slowly coming back. Water is still a biggie! Gas supply is much better but could be living off a generator for a week or two. Wearing the same shorts for 5 days now...would sure love a washing machine!

I'll update as I can.



Re: Odile

Sept 17, 2014

...Update from Mark, was able to get through via phone last night and text this am.

+ No power or running water yet, he's out fishing this am to try and get some food for folks.

+ He said there weren't any problems last night, no riots. People are protecting their own houses. They boarded up one entrance to the Pedregal to control anybody trying to get in.

+ He went down to the consulate yesterday to get on a list for a flight home, his original flight is scheduled to leave Cabo next Friday, the 26th. He wants to stay there through the next storm that's suppose to hit this weekend and has guys scheduled to replace our broken windows on Monday or Tuesday of next week.

+ Mark, Roger and Denise commented that there are 30-50K tourists that need to get out, at the airport yesterday there were 12-15 planes departing every 25 minutes. SW just signed up to come in and fly people out and I know Alaska is helping bring resources in. Mark said they are evacuating people from the hotels first, that they'll call him when he can get on a plane. There's one guy at the condo that he's been hanging out with and he, the captain of our boat stayed with him last night. He said he feels safe which makes me feel a little better.

That's it for now, appreciate all of you that have provided your unit numbers and codes and have offered Mark any food or water that you have, I've passed that info along to him. He said he's hoping the power will be back on in the next day or two, so crazy. Mark's cell phone voicemail is going to be his work number back home, lmk if you need to message anything to him and I'll send him a note via Whatsapp or talk to him when I can on the phone.



Subject: Bibi 17 September

Bibi just called with an update. I'll write the comments that she made:

The good news is that they are OK and no damage to their home not even a broken window.

Major headline is that things are really bad. She strongly advised no one to come down until the police and military have reestablished control. Organized gangs have systematically looted the big retailers like Walmart and Costco and there are stories of other armed bands going house-to-house and taking what they want. Stories of cars being hijacked. Safety and security is huge concern and they are going out as little as possible. Strongly urged that no one come down until security is reestablished as foreigners in particular are at risk.

Water, gas and electricity are all out although they just got their landline reestablished.

They did make it to the complex and there is extensive damage. It varies by unit. She did not give a specific report on each unit.



ODILE, SEPTEMBER 24, 2014

This is the first email i have been able to send since the hurricane arrived:

Early Sunday we believed we were well prepared for this storm. We had secured everything outside that could get blown away and turn into a missile. We had breakfast at Billigans at 10AM - and were amazed that the wave tops were cresting over the top of the arch, with some waves rolling up to our feet in the restaurant. Little did we know that this was only the opening act of the worst storm to hit Los Cabos since 1993. By 2:00PM the early bands of rain arrived in squalls, causing satellite TV to disappear, and the power outages to start. We were told prior to loss of satellite TV, cellular and internet signal that the worst of the hurricane would turn to the west and we would get only the outer bands, perhaps a category 1 or 2. Not good but better than the other option. By 4:00PM we felt the first good blast, maybe 60 mph with horizontal rain. Now the windows were beginning to bend and creak under the strain and the noise

level went up much higher. Power had gone off 3 times, so we started the generator for the last time which isolated us from the now unreliable grid. We felt secure in our casa with category 5 screens staining under the steadily increasing wind. Now it was 7:00PM and we realized the original forecast was out of whack, we were in for a bad ride. The noise increased steadily, and we still had an intermittent cell phone signal. Our friends in the US who had access to the satellite feed advised us that the eye of the storm was about to pass over us. This was far beyond what we expected but soon it became reality. Shortly after 10:00PM the worst of the worst hit. WE were told later that the winds at that time were in excess of 135 mph, category 4. This wind was coming from the north, the side our front door faces. We retired to our bedroom as it was the driest and quietest place in the structure, and moments later the plate glass of our front door separated from its frame. I think the words to the Gordon Lightfoot song goes something like this ...”At seven PM the main hatchway gave in and he said fellows it’s been good to know ya.” Well that summed up our feelings at that moment.

The piece of glass did not break, it simply left the frame and travelled several feet before it shattered into many pieces of deadly missiles. We were fortunately not in the path of this projectile, and I can confirm that piece of quarter-inch glass weighed in at 200 pounds plus or minus. Now a giant opening presented itself to the north wind and the windows on the south side of our house began to bend in the opposite direction. I quickly raced about t open windows to relieve the pressure which quickly went to 1.5 atmospheres. If you are not acquainted with that term, it is similar to free diving to 16 feet of water. Ears pop and that is what was happening.

By now the water was pouring through the new opening in our north side, much like a high tide in a windstorm pointed at our face. We briefly tried to place a half sheet of plywood over the opening from the outside. This proved hopeless as the plywood turned into a wind surfing kite. We gave up on that and retired back to our now drenched bedroom where 2 inches of water now lay on the floor. At 12:00 midnight, the eye wall arrived and that was really bad, gusts were apparently 165 mph. The noise was the worst part, wind and rain hitting windows and the sound of roof tiles rattling on the roof. And then the wind stopped. I stuck my head outside and realized I was standing in the eye of a major hurricane. It was dead calm and the stars were twinkling. I knew we had only moments so I raced out with the aforementioned plywood and secured it to the inside frame of the front door where once a beautiful bronze reflective entrance door stood and was now laying in a thousand pieces about my feet. Moments later the backside of the eye wall arrived and I assured my wife that the back side of a hurricane is always less destructive than the front. Well I guess my wife is not going to believe me for a long time because the backside of this monster was totally uncharacteristic. The wind shifted by 180 degrees and now the south side of our battered casa was taking the beating. We tried in vain to keep up with the water that poured in through every crack and orifice in our Mexican designed windows. We finally retired to our waterlogged bedroom to wait out the storm. By 6:00AM Monday morning, the wind dropped to a tropical storm and we knew we had survived.

Our first venture to the outside was more than depressing. In addition to our water-soaked interior and one missing front door, 7 palm trees had been unable to stand up to the force of this blast. The few trees that remained looked like they had been pruned to the trunk by some mean-spirited giant that wished to punish us for having such beautiful trees. The wind had turned the sand into a sandblasting machine, very effective and thorough.

After securing out home we travelled into town to view the destruction, and it soon became apparent that our damage was nothing compared to what lay before us. I recall seeing photos of Hiroshima after the blast and much of Cabo San Lucas resembled those photos. People were in the street, staring in shock at the utter and complete devastation. Just about every palm tree was down, many buildings were leveled, and literally thousands perhaps hundreds of thousands of windows were gone. Glass and debris lay everywhere. The recently abandoned Chevrolet dealership was now located in the middle of the main street. Our immediate goal was to secure the openings in our (and other) homes that had taken a hit. Our first trip to the glass man was hopeless as a lineup had already formed and it would soon prove useless to even ask for a replacement window. I would estimate that the existing inventory of glass might cover a small percent of the damage. The rest will have to be shipped in from mainland Mexico over roads that are also damaged. I have documented photos of some of the damage and will share those with anyone who wishes to see what a real disaster looks like.

At this time, September 22, we do not have electricity, although it is slowly coming on in parts of town. The internet and cellular service is slowly coming back as well. The roads are being cleared of mud and debris and the stores are opening with minimal inventory. The golf course fared much better, seemed to like the rain.



LPE PERSONAL HURRICANE ACCOUNTS

SHAKEN AND STIRRED

Shaken, because the night Odile hit was truly terrifying. Stirred, because after that night of terror we were flooded with so many emotions. By the way, since one of the problems with Odile was how to pronounce it, we have decided to pronounce Odile so it rhymes with bile. This seems appropriate.

We knew in March. In fact, Andy greeted me upon my return to Baja this past spring with “get ready, its going to be a wild ride this summer”. He had been visiting the local tackle shops and the buzz was 13-15 hurricanes this season with 3-4 big ones. OK, good to know. We had 3 months to prepare. We were not going to leave. We had built a hurricane proof house and riding out a big one was something we thought we could do. After all, we chose to live here. It didn't seem right to run and hide every time a hurricane bears down.

We had storm shutters, a generator, first aid kit, freezer & pantry full of food, 25 gallons of drinking water, cat food for the lads, 30 gallons of gasoline, three cell phones, plenty of flashlights and batteries, lots of books. We spent days talking about various scenarios. Where would we go in a storm? Stay in the main house with lots of glass or go to one of our Casitas? Friends had varying opinions. We needed an egress that didn't have to be shuttered. How ironic it would be to survive a hurricane only to be found days later trapped inside our house because there was no way out. In the end we decided we would go to one of our Casitas for the really big hurricanes – less glass and a wood door that we thought would hold up.

The next challenge was staying on top of the developing storm season. It started in May, much earlier than usual, a harbinger for things to come. We monitored each storm, thankful for the website www.eebmike.com. How fast was it moving? Was it tracking towards landfall or out to the Pacific? How strong were the winds? Could it still turn and head up the Sea of Cortez?

We didn't react until Marie, a category 5, but tracking out to the west. We spent the night in the pool room,

a small room attached to the main house, with a bathroom and a room the cats were comfortable being confined in. We did not need a shuttered door since Marie would not bring in heavy winds. But by morning we were slopping around in an inch of water and just thankful that Marie was long gone out to the Pacific.

Next came Norbert, not as strong as Marie, only a category 2 or 3 but closer to landfall. Still, we thought this was not the big one, so no need to evacuate to the Casita yet. Oh my, what a night. Howling winds and so much rain. We are from Seattle and we thought we knew rain. But we didn't know Baja rain. The rain meter read nearly 5 inches in that single night. At one point the wind hit the unshuttered foyer iron and glass door with so much force that we each grabbed a cat and spent the next hour locked in the 15 square foot powder room. We emerged the next morning feeling sheepish. We should have evacuated to the Casita. Ok, we won't make that mistake again.

Sooner than we liked, Odile appeared on our computer screen. She was huge, a true monster. The radar image showed her as long as the whole 900 mile Baja Peninsula. She was a slow mover though, only making her way north at 5 or 6 miles per hour. So, our watch began. Will she intensify? Hook west or east? When will she get here? This was stressful. We felt like we were sitting on train tracks, with the knowledge that a locomotive was heading right towards us. Then it was decided. Headlines read "Odile will be the biggest hurricane in modern Mexican history". She was headed directly for the blunt end of Baja. WHAT? The Mexican President declared a state of emergency and told everyone in the Los Cabos area (that's us) to evacuate. WHAT?

Evacuate? How? Where? This was Saturday. Odile was to hit Sunday. Surely the evacuation alert was for people who were not prepared. We were. Right? After an anxious and crazy 24 hours we had locked down everything again. Buttoned up one more time. Everything loose was stowed inside. We moved into the Casita. We were now out of wireless range in the Casita, but it didn't matter because at 8:29PM on this infamous September 14th we lost power anyway. The noise was unbearable. It was angry. It was relentless. At 10PM we noticed the wooden double door, the one we had kept unshuttered so we could get out, was vibrating. It was locked and pegged into stone floor, but it was vibrating. We could not believe it. We knew we had hours still to go before this slow moving beast was off us. That door was not going to hold.

The biggest thing in the room was a queen bed with a sturdy wooden bedframe. We dumped the mattress and braced the frame against the vibrating door. It was not enough, but we discovered if we pushed ourselves against the frame, the shaking would lessen. We also vented the wooden door by opening up the two 6"x 6" inch square peepholes to let some of the wind pass through. It helped, but also created another problem. We now had two openings to the rage outside. Water poured in. Sand ran down the door. Rain swept in under the door, too. The rain water, building up quickly, started to alarm the lads and they began that horrible mournful howl that only cats can do. We spent the next 5 hours bracing ourselves against a bedframe, with water lapping around our ankles, sand running in rivulets, howling cats, banshee-like winds and unidentifiable noises as things crash outside around us. We later learned that one of the unidentifiable noises was the deep guttural honk of a giant bull frog.

The wind and rain started to let up around 7AM which was when we emerged from our room. It looked like total devastation. The landscaping was nearly gone after six years of coaxing plants to grow in this desert. There was what looked like a 20 foot wide sand arroyo swath through our courtyard and ending in our pool which had 18 inches of sand in it. The fronds of 3 foot fan palm trees were completely buried under this sand arroyo. Roof tiles were strewn everywhere, which explained one more of the unidentifiable noises from the

night before. But we were safe and sound, at least bodily sound. I was worried about our neighbors and our Mexican friends, but we had no way of communicating with them. There was no internet, no cell service, no power, no running water. We were also positive that there was no passable access to our town of La Ribera. All we could do was thank God that we were OK and pray that everyone else was OK, too.

We removed a storm shutter from the main house kitchen door and cautiously entered, amazed to find that nothing was amiss. One window storm shutter had been ripped from its anchoring bolts, another explanation for one more of those unidentifiable noises. The window itself held. We later found the storm shutter ½ mile north of us a little damaged but repairable. But, we had no leaks, no water swept under the doors, nothing broken, nada. Another little thank you prayer to the Almighty.

And, thank you to the smiling faces that showed up – our wonderful caretaker Manolo; new neighbors the Williamsons; Stina and Debby, lot owners next to us, who were in town for a visit; David Valentich who brought us a thermos of really good coffee; Peter Benyo, his brain spinning out non-stop ideas. We visited the Talleys who had weathered it well but were leaving to drive to San Diego for a family reunion. They graciously gave us 10 gallons of drinking water as it was fair to assume the power and water would be out for several more weeks. We made rounds on the Polaris to tour the neighborhood and saw no serious damage. But on a sad note, we later learned from our friend John Spencer that he estimates a loss of 50-70% of our bird population. And, of course, at this point we had no idea of the destruction that this rampaging hurricane had caused in Cabo San Lucas and San Jose and was soon to do the same to La Paz.

With Manolo's help we hired several guys from La Ribera and the clean up began. By Friday the sand had been shoveled and wheeled out of the courtyard and ocean front terrace. Damaged plants were cut back to the bone. Debris was collected and deposited. We still had no power, no internet, and gasoline was scarce, but I was able to find a corner in the courtyard that occasionally got 2-3 bars of cell service. We connected to our family, Nick and Julie who started to track the storms for us from Seattle. We also reached our dear neighbors the Svobodas who watch the storm progression stateside, too. These cell calls to the Svobodas, Nick and Julie were our lifeline to the world and how we learned that Hurricane Polo was now on its way.

Now at this point, upon hearing this news about another storm, I must confess, I was no longer feeling adventurous, brave, nor proud of having survived the beast. I was simply exhausted, depressed and questioning all our decisions about living here. But, Polo came and went with lots of rain and a few scary blasts of wind. Then came Rachael bringing more of the same, nothing like Norbert and Odile, but a notable storm nonetheless.

We've now had 5 hurricanes in as many weeks. After being without electricity for 12 days, the power is back on and we have running water. Most roads are passable. Cell service is strong and reliable again. The pool is now finally drained, cleaned and re-filled. I've been swimming in it, and Andy has been in the ocean daily. The damaged bougainvillea already has new shoots. More good neighbors, Mark Paulus, Kurt Owen and Charlene Moss, have flown in to clean up and repair damages to their homes. We no longer have that desperate feeling of isolation. We've had good laughs and a few beers on the terrace looking out on the brilliant, beautiful, amazing Sea of Cortez. Dazzling azure sky and sparkling blue waters, it looks like paradise again. Fishing boats are starting to venture out.

We are wiser now. We've lost our swagger about riding a storm. I now pay more attention to the changing clouds patterns and the flocks of birds flying away from forming cloud banks. I know that we need a few

more things to weather this again – a satellite phone, a bigger supply of gasoline, another generator, more drinking water, more mopping up towels and an ice maker would be nice. Next time we will be better prepared. We do love it here. We will not be leaving. There are far more checks in the plus column than in the minus column.

As I sit here, now, it is 7:21AM. Andy has brewed a second pot of coffee. It is light enough to see the horizons. Black clouds sit off to the east, south and west. The north is socked in. They tell us this one is named Simon, but not to worry because it is hooking west. Still, I can see the rain coming and know that wind is right behind it. We do not know the future, but we do know life is very, very good.

We love you all and thank you sincerely for your kindness and positive thinking. It has fortified us. Mary Jane & Andy

note: A special thank you goes out to our son, Nick who faithfully sent updates of our status to family and friends who reached out to him, and to Julie Hall who posted updates to Facebook as soon as she learned of new developments. You two are the best.



Submitted by Melanie Williamson

First, it is worth noting that the first hurricane Andy and I endured was probably the most difficult to pronounce. We've heard Odile called O-Dial, O-Deel and O-Dule. We are just calling it O-Shit.

Disclaimer: We are usually well informed and well-prepared. I don't ever want to be called the "Dumb Gringos" and when we left the US on Friday September 12, Odile was set to track west of Baja. We are not ones to go head-on into bad situations, and really had no idea the storm would do more than rain a lot with some high winds. Disclaimer aside, we as "Dumb Gringos" did get

trapped after all. But quick, calm thinking and smart choices got us out safely.

Our trip to a Baja began with great excitement. Our first week in the new Casa that had been in progress since January and in planning stages since 2010. My 50th birthday, and fully stocked stores in Cabo, San Jose and even La Paz awaited our pesos as we filled our new home with stuff. A generator was on that list, as were curtain rods, pots/pans, bar stools and many other home furnishings I had anticipated buying for months. I am ashamed to admit that nowhere on that long list was even a mention of a first-aid kit. That has since moved to the top of the list, right after a generator. The curtain rods are still a very close third.

After our first night in our new home Friday, we stayed at the Casa on Saturday, getting to know our new kitchen, moving the silverware three times, and getting internet installed. Yay, I thought, we are now connected to the outside world! This connection would sadly be short lived. On Sunday, the day we had planned to relieve Baja stores of their inventory, we awoke to terrible forecasts, the shiny-new internet connection already providing invaluable information. I begrudgingly agreed we should postpone our trip to Cabo for safety. Besides, we still had a yard full of construction debris that had yet to be hauled away. Two-by-fours with nails sticking out, half-sheets of ragged plywood, PVC pipe and even rods of rebar were scattered around the yard, awaiting a gust of wind to turn them into a missile. Grateful for the cloud cover, we went to work corralling the debris, stacking it in a neat pile, and using leftover cinder blocks to create a "wall" around the pile. We even stacked bricks on top, hoping to pin things down further. We evicted more than one lizard, several crickets and one giant Black Widow in the process. I choose to believe they all found safe comfortable burrows elsewhere in which to ride out the coming storm, hopefully not in our Casa.

After cleaning up, I did what I do best in a crisis and made food, in this case "hurricane enchiladas". Oh the joy of my new kitchen! The oven is so shiny! And the disposable turkey roasting pan purchased at Chapeto's in Los Barriles worked great. The storm was storming but we had hot food - life is good. Shortly after dinner, at about 7:15, the power went out, taking all the fun out of the evening pretty quickly.

I had insisted we drag our (new) mattress out of the master, and set up camp in the living room. A solid rock wall and concrete bookcase made it the obvious choice to weather the storm. It also gave a great view of our (un-shuttered) north windows and doors, which luckily are all under a large patio roof overhang. Hurricane shutters quickly nudged curtain rods out of third place on what is now "The List". My reasoning to camp in the center of the house was because the master was exposed on one side, and the side under a patio roof housed a window, French doors, but more concerning, a giant opening for a giant dog door for our giant dog. (See "The List" for reference to tools to install the dog door.) Andy had custom-fit a large chunk of foam, the same foam the Casa is made of, so in theory strong, and wedged that into the dog door opening. I wasn't convinced it would hold, so I quietly shut the door to the master and hoped for the best.

We actually slept for awhile, while the storm raged I felt safe enough to catch some Z's until about midnight. I wondered what Andy was doing by the front door? With my new bath towel? And mop? WTH? Powerful Odile was driving rain under the front door. There was quite a lot of it, and a mop and bath towel was not going to cut it. I had traveled to the Casa in August for final design decisions, and brought down some lighting from the States in my luggage. In an effort to pad the lighting supplies, I packed 8 beach towels and several bar towels to act as padding. I don't really believe in coincidence, but this was not the time to praise the gods and their shining on us - I just fumbled in the dark closet to find them. Our efforts were enough to keep the water at bay, but at one point rain was coming through the seams of the heavy wooden door! Lazy bubbles of water formed at each seam, slowly bursting as the wind became stronger. That was by far the most surreal event of the adventure. Bubbles. Coming through a solid wood door. I wiped them away and moved back to mopping the wet floor.

Our (new) mattress was quite wet. Andy's hard back book was soaked and warped where he had laid it on the floor after reading with a headlamp. My (brand new) iPad was safely on the table, where I placed it before I went to sleep, thinking the floor was a bad idea. Another coincidence? See previous statement that I don't believe in them. iPad crisis averted. Our mopping, towel wringing and bucket hauling brigade continued for about 2 1/2 hours. During that time, there was a 10 minute period of time when things got really quiet. I thought "Is it over? Was that it?" Only to have the howling and roaring start up again. There is no way to confirm it, but we believe that was the eye traveling over Lighthouse Point. We now know we were in the epicenter of a category 3 Hurricane. Hey, I'm a Utah girl. We get thunderstorms in the summer and the "bad" ones last 20 minutes. Sure we get snow, lots and lots of snow. But it generally falls in a gentle and quiet fashion -- no wind, no blizzards with snow blowing sideways. (Ok, sideways happens, but not very often and not for long.) This kind of wind was honestly a little rude to my way of thinking. Thankfully it subsided and we were able to get some sleep. And amazingly, we did sleep. We woke up about 7:30 am and it was still raining and blowing, but not nearly as bad. I made Andy promise, straight out cross-your-heart-and-hope-to-die pinkie swear

promise he would not go outside during the storm. There was no way I was letting him out of that promise to assess the damage before danger had passed. So we slept for 2 more hours. I guess hauling wood and horking bricks the day before, along with mopping for 2 1/2 hours and a major adrenaline crash did us in. I feel lucky we could rest. We were going to need it.

First thing - coffee. Please. Gas stove and a frying pan (no pots purchased yet remember?) and I had steaming cups to fortify us. Breakfast was like any other day - yogurt and fruit, since the (new) freezer still had ice and was doing a great job keeping things cold. There was really nothing more to do to put off going outside.

The pile of bricks covering debris hadn't moved at all! At first glance all was well structurally and it looked like we just got wet. At further inspection we saw the palapa on the roof deck was "bent" leaning to the north west a bit. It was pulled about four inches from its base, but we are so lucky it wasn't ripped off taking the roof with it. Our contractor had built a "real" temporary bathroom for the workers; a plywood enclosure around a plumbed toilet and a sink outside. The walls were about 9 feet tall at one point, but the storm had shortened that by more than half. Shredded plywood remained, flapping in the wind, beating against the still functional toilet and sink. I immediately thought of the building materials of some Mexican houses - sadly most are made from whatever they can get their hands on and held together with prayers and chewing gum. Although I had no idea of the devastation outside Lighthouse Point, I started to really feel heartsick for Mexico and her people.

We saw a fellow resident across the street, David Valentich, working at our neighbors (and very generous friends) John & Deb Svoboda's beach-front Casa. They have a lovely compound with 2 garages, a casita, 2 courtyards, a pool and main house. I had seen it the day before when I went to "borrow" some duct tape to seal up our own Casa. The once lush gardens were all but stripped. Not-yet-ripe citrus lay on the ground where the wind had flung them from the branches. Bogenvilla that had to be pushed away to walk by the day before was trimmed to the nub of branches. The pool was full of sand. The structures thankfully looked unharmed! Being right on the beach has risks, and after seeing the size of the swells the day before, long before the storm started in earnest and before it got dark, I would not have been surprised if the house had been horribly damaged. All looked relatively alright.

One of the most important things you need to survive in Baja is good friends and generous neighbors. The Svobodas have proven to be both to us. I was given permission to borrow things if need be, and need-did-be this trip! I found a pot to boil water for coffee and to cook the pasta I borrowed from Deb's pantry. It went nicely with the pasta sauce I also commandeered. Remember, I was to do a major shop on Sunday. We were stranded with just a few groceries we picked up on the way in to "get by" until we went to Costco. I did not know at the time that Costco as we know it was no more, but I did know we were not getting out anytime soon. Note to self: Stock Pantry. Well. Next Trip. We also borrowed 2 clotheslines and clothes pins to attempt to dry our wet towels. Second to a well stocked pantry is a well stocked garage. Note To Andy: Build Garage. Stock Garage. Well. Sooner Than Budgeted.

We saw the Svobodas had some water damage, but to my untrained hurricane-problem-diagnostic-skill-set, it appeared to have come in through the chimney. Overall, not bad.

We visited our neighbors to the east, Andy and Mary Jane, who are full time residents. They were hit hard, but nothing worse than sand, sand, sand. In the pool. In the patch of Bermuda grass, on the patio. Their night was very harrowing, huddled in their casita (their main house is beach front with many windows) doing their best to hold the front door closed against the storm. The two of them, with a bed frame, kept the door from blowing in. I was already feeling lucky.

The process of living became a priority. Power was a biggie, but headlamps, candles and flash lights all we really needed - and had brought down! I worried about the little food we had going bad, but the new LG fridge was doing really well at keeping things cold. David had been into La Ribera and we learned they couldn't offer much. And then there was the road out. Keep in mind at this point we thought Lighthouse Point got the worst of it. We figured given our remote location, power wouldn't be restored for several days at best. We wanted out. We wanted the outside world information, to send email to let our family and friends we were ok. So we tried on Tuesday. Not a good idea. When we rented the Jeep at the SJD airport, we had asked for a 4x4. It sadly was not four wheel drive, and we realized quickly we were not getting out. Back to the Casa to reassess.

Andy managed to rig water to our house. We are located close enough to the main tank and at the bottom of the hill, so gravity worked for us. The hot water heater igniter is on battery and run on propane so voila - hot showers! I'm thinking we could have started charging for those hot showers had we stayed longer. But there was still dwindling food, lack of fresh drinking water and

the dream had to end sometime. So Wednesday morning we packed up our stuff and the house. We had brought down 2 large suitcases full of sheets, bedding and the still-yet-to-be-hung curtains and planned on bringing them home empty. We left them at LHP because as Andy said, we needed to be as nimble as possible on our trek out. I am 50 years old and I'm quite sure I've never used the word nimble in a sentence but it did apply. Off to adventure.

We tried to head south to San Jose, and made it across one washout north of Cadauno. However, the bridge at Cadauno was gone. Not just broken - missing a whole section. This was a blessing in hind site, remember we had yet to hear of the horrendous conditions in Cabo.

We were low on gas (had enough to get to the SJD airport) and I was extremely nervous. Civilization sounded good, so we headed back north to Los Barriles. We got gas, waiting only 40 minutes, at the station on the north side of Los Barriles. I felt immediately able to conquer Baja. Our biggest problem was lack of information. You don't realize how important internet is until you don't have it. We were hoping to find info in LB but instead found rumors flying. I did see some news at the Palmas de Cortez, and saw they were evacuating 30,000 tourists from Cabo to Mexico City. Then I knew it was bad, but still had no idea of the devastation and desperation in Cabo. We went to our friends house, Rod & Barb Allbright who live near Rancho Leonero and next door to a favorite rental we've stayed in several times. If anyone had info, they would! Well, they really didn't have much, but it was able to make a VoIP call from Barbs iPad to spread the news back home we were in fact alive. (see previous comment about having friends in Baja). We were able to determine Alaska Air was trying to get people out, 3 flights Tuesday with promise (?) of more. We decided to settle in for the night at Palmas de Cortez in Los Barriles and go to San Jose in the morning. The good news was Palmas had a room. The bad news was that wing of the hotel had no power. 50% discount off regular room rate, but I would have paid triple to not have to shower with a flashlight and sleep with the front door open. Hot. Muggy. Buggy. Bed. Priorities. We were able to have some semblance of normalcy and have dinner at Tio's. My favorite Fish and Chips, a drink with ice, and I got to charge my phone on the fan's extension cord. I'm easily pleased.

I have often said I have someone looking out for me. Thursday morning this was blatantly obvious. We had planned to drive to Cabo, going around Todo Santos since the bridge was out. Suddenly out of nowhere, Andy said "Let's drive to Loreto instead." "Hell yes - Let's" I said. Topped off the gas (20 minute wait at 7:45 am) and headed north. We had heard that here was an area outside San Bartolome where cell service was available. Once we got in the area, the "pineapple express" network took off. Friends in Baja are good to have. So are relatives in the States who can make things happen. Within 30 minutes of texting my dear sister, we had confirmed flights on Friday from Loreto to LAX, LAX to SLC and a room at the lovely La Mision Hotel in Loreto. Solution found! End in sight! A lovely drive up the coast of Baja and a seaside hotel waiting for us. This was starting to feel like vacation! The drive was six hours, and mostly uneventful. The further we got from Cabo, the less things were damaged. La Paz was quite devastated, but they were pumping gas and most of the traffic lights worked. There was a check point going into La Paz where they were checking for looter's booty. We got through immediately, but fellow escapees in our Loreto hotel waited 2 1/2 hours the night before. We only had to drive over 3 or 4 downed (Live? Dead?) power lines, and we stared to see CFE trucks (Mexico's infrastructure-fixing-agency). We saw some awful things. Obviously poor families, with nothing much to begin with, had their meager belongings and furniture outside drying. Entire sides of commercial buildings just gone. Every tall sign shaped like a Pacifico beer can was down. (Pacifico has some replacing to do in La Paz - there were seriously about 10 downed signs.) During this long, beautiful and often remote drive, I couldn't help but notice the flora and fauna was mostly oblivious to the chaos. Bunnies hopped through the vast cactus fields, hawks and crows soared overhead, and even goats seemed content munching at the rain-soaked grasses. It's just we humans, who built the things that can come down, who suffer when nature rears her head and brings those things down. Hard.

Once we got to the hotel, and finally got internet after four long days, we realized how awful, heartbreaking, devastating, there-are-no-words-for-how-bad-it-is. My priority when back in the states is finding a way to help. Raise money, spread the word, whatever it takes. They need our help, and I feel it is our duty to respond.

One final problem (there's always one more isn't there?) We had a National Rental Car, and there's no National Car return in Loreto. We were able to find a phone number for the National desk in La Paz (stateside-sister again, god bless Cari) and pleaded panic, helplessness and dire straights and they agreed to come pick it up. We took many pictures of the not-4x4-four-wheel vehicle, with a time stamp, in front of the hotel and left it there, handing the keys over to the almost-manager of the hotel. I did wonder how many rental cars are abandoned in Cabo. They were probably grateful to be hearing from us at all.

I've never used the words "rescue" and "flight" together, but I did on Friday at the airport. The plane was big, big enough for 200

people, and they offered convenient open-seating. Best way to deal with throngs of people showing up without reservations right? This was the closest I came to being really, really scared the whole week, even more than the worst of the storm. I thought I would get trampled, and almost lost it mentally - this was the only melt down (very minor considering what we had been through) and it only resulted in tears welling up in my eyes. This got me some sympathy from fellow-would-be-rioters who moved aside to "give the crying lady some air here."

As I finish this very long story, I'm sitting on our final flight from LAX to SLC. Ironically as I finally got email, I saw an email from Alaskan Air regretting to inform me our regularly scheduled flight on Saturday out of Cabo San Lucas has been cancelled. They are very sorry for the inconvenience. Good thing we didn't wait around for our "real" flight.

I've heard absolutely horrific stories in the last 2-3 days. People stuck in hotel rooms for 36 hours while filthy water a foot deep filled the room. A mom with her kids waited for daddy in the restaurant on Sunday night, getting separated for 16 hours until the hotel deemed it safe. People paying \$1,000 per couple for a 10 hour taxi drive from Cabo to Loreto, 14 people jammed into a van made for 10. Banditos posing as "room service" in the middle of the night, only to demand money when the guest opened the door. The last one is hearsay, but looting of local stores was rampant. Costco, Home Depot, WalMart and Mexico's large grocery store Mega were all cleared out by both desperate people and the base of society that rears it's ugly head in times of crisis. I wish I could say I saw good too, but we were really quite insulated during the whole ordeal. We were lucky to be where we were, and to be blessed with the wisdom to make good choices. And the help and prayers of friends and family!!!

We have heard many say they'll never go back to Baja, and that saddens me. It is a beautiful landscape full of wonderful people. They rely on tourism and without it, the destination will die. I hope they can rebuild and recover. We will go back, and plan to live there full time one day. But we will always keep a home in the States, and it occurs to me that August & September are Utah's finest months. This crazy, terrifying and sometimes unbelievable experience proved to us that we are "Baja Strong" and can safely say we have what it takes to live there successfully. We've always known it is not for the faint of heart, and I consider our initiation a success.

If you want to know how many friends you really have, fall off the face of the earth while in a war-zone. I received so many emails and texts, and I still have 7 unheard voicemails. So thank you for caring, for worrying and for putting up with me and my nutty husband's great ideas. He always keeps me safe, offers fabulous adventure (most of the time) and gives me great fodder for ramblings just like this one.

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