

Kate rages in Islands

Surprise hurricane wreaks fury in the Turks and Caicos

Stories by Narmala Shewcharan

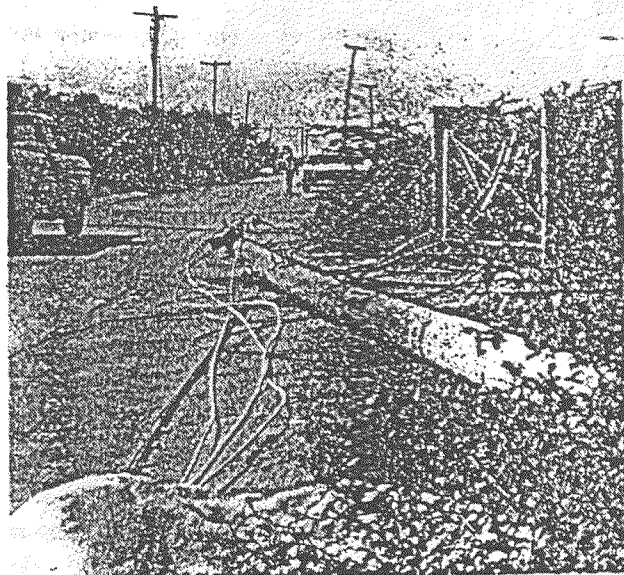
HURRICANE Kate swept by these islands two Sundays ago raging until early the next day, leaving in its fury a devastation of trees, displacement of roofs and the wreckage of a number of buildings, boats and electricity poles.

But Islanders and others on the whole were relieved at the mildness of the hurricane, many having experienced Hurricane Donna in 1960 which had exacted far more extensive damage.

Says one Islander who lived through Donna 25 years ago: "Hurricane Kate could have been much worse if she had lasted half an hour more."

Kate came roaring in before midnight and intensified around one o'clock, but seasoned "hurricanes" maintained that the eye whizzed over Grand Turk to alight on Provo, South and North Caicos where it wreaked its fury.

If the minimal damage — apart from electricity poles — in Grand Turk is anything to go by, they may be right; many are agreed that Grand Turk was fortunate. The most damage in the private sector was apparently sustained by the French restaurant, Papillon Rendezvous, situated on Front Street and which seemed to have received the brunt of the gusty winds. Papillon owners, Xavier Tonceau and Suzanne Brisebols estimate the damage at \$20,000.



Downed power lines were for several hours a hazard to motorists and pedestrians after the storm.

The roofs of several other buildings also suffered extensive damage including one belonging to Alex and Edith Dickinson, situated also on Front Street; and the verandah of the "Lady," a disco on the ridge.

The only reported damage of boats on Grand Turk came from Mike Spillar of the Turks Island Divers who said that his vessel had been cast away and wrecked on shore, but noted he was unable at

the time he spoke to the *News* to estimate the damage.

Reports also spoke of two yachts being wrecked on the shore of South Caicos and another, barely escaping with minimal damages. One of the buildings which suffered most damage in that area was one housing Barclays Bank, where the entire roof was reportedly ripped off.

Hotels in Provo also appeared to be badly affected and reports state that the roofs of a number of these

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• Continued from Page 1

were blown off. A wing which was being added on to Club Med also suffered some damages.

But it was on Bottle Creek where the most extensive damage was exacted in terms of losses of homes.

Government estimated that at least 75 houses were badly damaged by Hurricane Kate; persons who had been inhabiting 30 of these are now homeless.

Officials including Governor Christopher Turner and Acting Chief Minister Robert Hall, Chief Secretary Ron Pincott among others were on the go the very next day, carrying out surveys to assess the after-hurricane situation.

Surveys were carried out in all the islands and Minister Hall later, speaking for the *News* noted: "All the islands seemed to have been touched by the hurricane. — Bottle Creek was hardest hit. — at least 30 houses were blown off . . . a few wooden buildings totally destroyed."

On the other hand, he noted that Salt Cay seemed to have fared reasonably well and the hurricane seemed almost to have skipped over that island.

But Hall noted that the damage to boats seemed serious, adding that a number of persons have lost their boats.

And on Middle and North Caicos, all the crops were destroyed which has created an immediate food problem for the people there.

Electricity poles on all the islands sustained damage, last tail winds of Hurricane Kate says reports, but Grand Turk is said to be the most affected

by the falling and breaking of poles and twisting of lines. A forthcoming release from the Electricity Department is expected to shed further light on the situation. But it is apparent from a spot survey that many poles were badly damaged; and although workers made valiant efforts to restore the situation to normal, the power kept going on and off for the entire week.

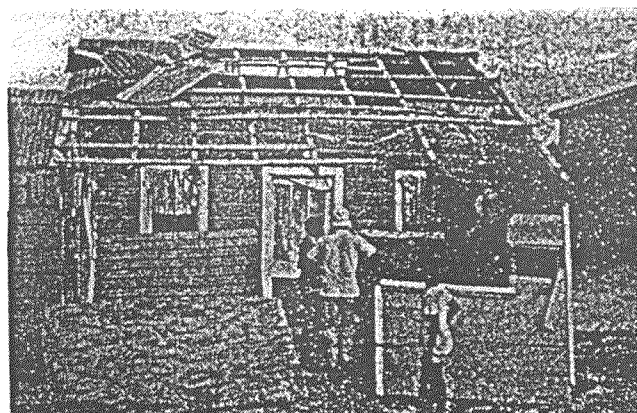
Some areas did get power restored up to last Friday and in one instance, after power had been restored to several areas, there was a sudden complete blackout on the entire town (part from those who had their own generators) which lasted for more than a day.

The shut down was caused by fire which suddenly flared at the Power House, but according to reports was quickly brought under control and not as serious as it might have been, considering how many tangled and live wires were strewn on the island.

It was at the most a dangerous situation as electrician Rosemane Charles found out, when as he was on the job the next day, was shocked and had to be rushed to the hospital. A piece of live equipment was said to have hit him in the head, but not seriously. He recovered in 24 hours.

Meanwhile the Electricity Department is still assiduously working to put the lines back in a safe condition, and as the last tail winds of Hurricane Kate are felt things are slowly returning to normal here and

thoughts and activities are turning towards rendering assistance to those in need.



A Grand Turk family try to mend the shattered ruins of their house after the passing of Hurricane Kate.

First whistling winds came in deafening blasts

IF YOU are like this reporter, who had never been in a hurricane before, when the first furious whistling winds came in deafening blasts — instantly lashing into fury a gusty breeze which had played with the waves before — you would have put your hands to your ears to stifle the splitting sounds and hope that no poor soul was caught out there in "that."

Hurricane Kate, I am told, was mild in comparison with some of its sisters and brothers who had made their presence known in no uncertain way and made impacts on the minds of men forever, if not on the oceans and lands through which they furiously carved their path.

Kate came here hours before midnight on a Sunday night decapitating trees, slashing at roofs and having a good go at buildings which put up strong resistance — its arrival shattering the hope of some that it may have erratically chartered a course outside these waters and the false security of those who had been lulled in that state over a

25 year hurricane-free period

Not that anyone was being inactive, hoping that the hurricane would by-pass the fair islands of the Turks and Caicos. In fact, by four o'clock Sunday afternoon, Islanders, visitors and others were caught in a flurry of activity as they hastened to secure their homes and to make other preparation to combat the imminent storm.

Come nightfall most were in an attitude of watchful anxiety, prepared to spend a sleepless night as they waited in readiness to evade the storm's fury should it come crashing through the roofs.

Some among myself had evacuated their homes, deemed unsafe, in preference of buildings with stronger foundations.

But expectations were high that evacuations would have to be made from even such apparently strong buildings as the winds began to do what must have been a mad victory dance as they made little ado with the trees, seized gleefully upon boats and other vessels

and assailed the roofs and other sections of the buildings which dared to stand strong against their might.

By that time, the electricity had been taken off — mercifully. And although Hurricane Kate had a good time knocking down pole after pole and throwing the wires in an undignified heap as she cast them down to earth, the damage was not compounded as it might have been. Luckily, the Electricity Department had switched off the power about just an hour before in response to their own common sense and to frantic calls from citizens who had been watching with growing alarm sparks of fire bouncing off the lines.

Sometime in the course of the night, Grand Turk lost several roofs as Kate had its way. A boat crashed onshore, wrecked. Branches and tree tops fell with devastating regularity, yielding to Kate's triumphant demands.

By six o'clock the next morning the heedless passion of the wind had abated, but the tail winds were still circling these tiny islands, nearly lifting me off my feet, as I hastened out with many others, somewhat apprehensively to check on damage.

Amongst those who were

out on these early checks were Governor Christopher Turner, Chief Secretary Ron Pincott and Attorney General David Lang.

The apprehensions of many soon disappeared as daylight showed a scene reflecting minimal damage — although twisted and broken electricity poles did tell a serious story and in one instance electricity workers had to hurry down South to remove a pole which had fallen across the road and may have caused injury to a careless passer-by.

The morning saw Grand Turk residents streaming all over the island checking on the damage of their friends and neighbours and hurrying to get the necessary equipment to make reparations to their own buildings.

As it became evident that the power may not be restored for several days, the hurry was for another purpose — to purchase batteries and kerosene. Soon most of the shops were out of these commodities.

But everyone was thankful that was all they had to make haste for and that at least no one had suffered personal injuries.

Yachtman battles storm in South Caicos waters

FOR Steve Collier, the minor accident which occurred to his left foot, the morning after the hurricane served as an anti-climax to his struggles with the raging winds which nearly wrecked his yacht, *Sephina* moored just off South Caicos.

The young British vacationer had arrived in these islands just a day before, choosing these normally tranquil waters as part of a winter sojourn which included cruising around the Caribbean and other equally delightful places.

For the yachtman — bent on having an enjoyable time in his place under the sun — a hurricane had absolutely no place in the two-year vacation he had allotted himself. He had taken time off as a captain

to give himself a well-earned holiday. And his venture to sail around the Caribbean and other places for sheer enjoyment was perhaps a dream come true.

Come the Sunday morning of the hurricane and his idyllic vacation saw a very unwanted interruption. He and his pal, Jeff heard the first news that a hurricane was brewing this way. There was no way to sail away in time, so they had to make the best of things.

The vacationer, however, was lucky. His craft did not crash and wreck itself on the shores of South Caicos — like two others did — when Hurricane Kate unleashed itself on the night of Sun-

day November 17. But it made a good try.

It was not a night to be out on land much less on the sea and for many boats and other sea crafts, Hurricane Kate with that gentle name sounded a knell of destruction.

The bosom of the ocean rose to heights that night. Waves became frenzied cascades moving at competitive speed to crash within seconds of each other aided by a whirling wind which gained momentum to whistle through the night and shatter the calmness at 85 miles per hour. But the yachtman had little time to contemplate the majestic imagery of the destructive elements as he battled for control of his yacht's wheel to keep *Sephina* from being propelled in a helpless fashion along with the giddy waves.

On land trees were being beheaded with noisy precision, plants flattened and house tops ripped off as the winds forcibly waged a right of way

through the Islands.

As Kate rose in fury, the yachtman and his craft were another tiny dot to be hurled out of the way. Later, the only clear impression the young man had was the jolting impact as the boat ran aground.

The yacht and occupants had landed ashore and in fairly good condition considering their ordeal. The next day dawned sunny although the tail winds were still swirling the waters and embracing the surviving trees. Hurricane Kate had passed and many were to agree later that she had not been that vengeful.

And then the accident occurred which slashed off the ends of four of his toes when his foot was caught in some equipment aboard.

"Unfortunate," was his wry reference to the accident when he spoke about it in the Grand Turk Hospital afterward.

But he did not blame Kate.