

# First-person accounts from an historic storm

Community leaders recall a week without power, lessons learned

**W**hat has become known as "The Great Coastal Gale" hit the region in December 2007, knocking down thousands of trees, stranding residents and leaving thousands with power, many for more than a week.

Among those who weathered the storm, a notable group stepped forward to work to ensure the safety and well-being of Seaside's residents.

Mary Blake, former director, Sunset Empire Park and Recreation District, helped set up a shelter at the Bob Chisholm Community Center. Lt. Chris Dugan was among the firefighters who cleared debris, battled blazes as they broke out and helped those in need. Seaside School District Superintendent Doug Dougherty addressed concerns of students and their families. Keith Chandler, general manager of the Seaside Aquarium, helped keep fish and aquatic life alive.

Here are their stories:

## Mary Blake

The storm came in, and as always, the community center was the heart and soul for a lot of people.

Not just for the safety elements, but it was the support of people who were rightfully fearful from the scary aspects of a big event.

We turned the community center into a 24-hour area where for three days we served breakfast, lunch and dinner. We had a little ukulele group do songs. We set up our park and recreation programs for kids to have a play area. Everybody was welcome.

The city was able to get a portable generator and we set it up outside. That gave us life.

It was Christmastime, so we had Christmas lights on the outside as well as the inside of the facility. Between Dec. 3 and Dec. 8, it operated for 122 continuous hours.

We also had a check-in so people would sign in. So if somebody was worried about somebody at home or a loved one or they were out of the area, they could check in with us. We had over 2,000 signatures of people using the facility, and we served over 6,000 meals.

All the restaurants and all the people with their freezers knew they didn't have enough electricity, before food became contaminated. We served up things like steaks, crab — some of the finest food you would ever find.

I slept in the shelter. We blew up a couple beds, and we set up our sleeping arrangements behind the counter. We sectioned off the card room, taped it off, so people had an assigned area they could set up their own little housekeeping.

If they needed to shower, they showered at the swimming pool.

We had a bus coordinated with the Providence Seaside Hospital if people



This steel billboard on Highway 101 was toppled by the storm.

## SEEN FROM SEASIDE

R.J. MARX



needed any kind of emergency services. We coordinated people and volunteers and it was a sight to behold.

It gave us an insight into any kind of big event, whether it was a man-made emergency or natural causes. You become as resourceful as you possibly can. You are really operating from the heart so you have a lot of compassion for what is going on. You fall back into what you practice for safety and survival.

People depended on the leadership that they had always counted on, whether or not it was going to the pool and having a good lifeguard to make sure they are safe in the water or driving in the streets of Seaside.

Our mayor, Don Larson, would always check in, which reassured people. Then we started to get the higher-level elected officials come in just to check out the damage. The people of the community really sprung into action.

In the end, the storm had so many positive things to really reinforce the people how strong we are together.

It was an incident that probably was one of my proudest moments.

## Lt. Chris Dugan

The first day, it was really starting to get a little nasty out, but no more than that. I remember going down to dispatch and it was probably within 10 minutes all heck broke loose. It seemed the wind blew, it rained, it just didn't stop. It was just ongoing.

One thing I remember is the phones being off and the power being off. We really expected one or both of them to come back very soon — and they never did.

We couldn't get calls to dispatch. We had trapped communities, trapped areas,



Janet Volchok and others came together for music and song while taking shelter at the community center.

where trees were down with no access to them. So we spent time getting trees out of the way.

(Firefighter) Doug Barker and I made an inventory of all the power lines down, all the trees down. We made a map of the city of where the issues were so we could hand it out to power company and public works.

I actually lived at the station for that week. There was a room available upstairs, so I slept up there. I basically went on all the calls possible.

The community center got a generator from Camp Rilea. I remember helping them get that set up at the back of their building so we could get heat and lights in there.

As a whole I really think it brought us altogether. We worked together and we made it through that. The power's on and we're talking on the phone.

That's where our resilience is going to be really tested.

## Doug Dougherty

I can't believe it has been 10 years since the storm. I remember we had a few days to prepare for strong winds.

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# Gift-wrapping matters

It's the first week of December and already I'm wrapping gifts. This would be a good time to share I am the world's worst gift wrapper. OK, maybe not the worst, but one of the worst. Which is why any retailer offering courtesy gift-wrapping gets an A+ from me.

When I was a college freshman, my friend Carolee got a part-time, seasonal job at the mall, gift wrapping. She said on any given shift, she might wrap 50 or more gifts.

How do you do it, I asked. It's easy, she said. I would have been fired the first hour.

When I was in elementary school, we had a housekeeper named Marguerite. She cooked, she ironed, she washed clothes, she braided hair. The only thing she wouldn't do was cleaning. She was a whiz, however, at wrapping gifts. She did that thing with the scissors where you curl the ribbon for the bow like nobody's business. I remember asking her to help me wrap Christmas gifts. She declined. I had the rolls of wrapping paper and the Scotch tape and the presents all ready. I didn't cut enough paper off the roll to wrap the first gift. The second gift, I had too much paper. By the time I got around to the third gift, Marguerite snatched it away.

This is the first and last time I'm going to do this for you, she said, grumbling. But it wasn't.

My immediate family has more than its share of bungled gift-wrapping stories.

My husband, who has never understood my obsession with gift wrap, is possibly an even worse gift wrapper than me. He might win our family award for Worst Wrapped Gift. He uses too much tape or not enough. Wrapping paper in his hands turns to confetti. He has no concept of neatly folded corners. In recent years he's taken to giving gifts in the shopping bag the store gave him.

I recall a Christmas bash at the home of a British friend named Sue. Sue and her husband Mark have since moved to jolly England, but I loved their house in New York which was creaky and Victorian with lots of odd nooks and crannies and wide board wooden floor boards. Sue labored for hours producing the vast array of English treats she put out including trifle and plum cake and sticky pudding with toffee sauce. I could hardly tear myself away from the apricot studded Stilton. They had a fabulous tree which went all the way to the parlor ceiling, every branch laden with homemade gingerbread men and strung popcorn and blown glass ornaments. I remember noticing the wrapped gifts under the tree had a pleasantly frumpy look.

Sue caught me eyeing these parcels as I stood, spiked punch in hand.

It's an English tradition to save the wrapping paper and use it again, she said. That's why we don't tear it, we carefully open it, to use again. Sometimes it lasts for years.

I like that, I said.

A long time ago, when I was quite young and single, I went to my friend Christina's place on Cornelia Street in Greenwich Village on Christmas Eve after her two young sons were in bed. Ostensibly I was there to help wrap their gifts. Christina was a single mom. She had a boyfriend named Tom who was there to assemble what needed assembly. Tom showed up with a bottle of peppermint schnapps. Needless to say, three hours into it, we'd barely wrapped anything.

Tell them Santa ran out of wrapping paper, Tom said.

My advice in general is don't give your sweetheart a Christmas gift in a brown paper bag.

## VIEW FROM THE PORCH

EVE MARX



EVE MARX/FOR SEASIDE SIGNAL

Great gifts begin with great wrapping.

# Throughout time, books are objects of fascination

Books have been around for hundreds if not thousands of years if you include scrolls and wax or clay tablets.

Books have been written on papyrus reeds, the skins of animals, and some have even been made using human skin, a practice called anthropodermic bibliopegy. Just reading about those books made my skin crawl! Apparently the most macabre books on death or dying in the 18th and 19th centuries were seen to add an extra level of esoteric interest if purported to be bound in human skin. Thankfully, most of those alleged bindings have been proven to have been made from sheep, cows, or goat skin.

The physically bound book continues to still have a great value to many. Especially those books seen as rare and unique either for the level of artistry or the history of the author themselves. Shakespeare and John Audubon both have created books that continue to sell for millions of dollars because of the content, rarity, and illustrations. Consider the following rare books and their current

## BETWEEN THE COVERS

ESTHER MOBERG



value or the perception of value that have for audiences today:

The Egyptian book of the dead is often represented in movies as a book for magic or causing death. In actuality, the book of the dead explains the Egyptian beliefs on the afterlife and what it takes for a person's "ka" or soul to be weighed the same as a feather (i.e., balanced truth and justice in that person's heart) by Anubis, in order to get to the Egyptian version of a heavenly afterlife. Those souls that weighed too much or too little were rejected and given over to Ammit, the devourer of souls. While movie versions of the book of the dead show a large black wooden book with beautiful clasps, the real book of the dead was either written on papyrus rolls or sections of it were painted on the walls and tombs of the funerary chambers of the

Egyptian kings.

The world's first printed atlas from the second century, the Geographia Cosmographia by Claudius Ptolemy was drawn on scrolls. It was republished in 1477, and a copy of that edition sold for nearly \$4 million in 2006. The known world of the time was mainly the Mediterranean. Ptolemy believed the sun revolved around the earth since the earth was the center of the (then) known universe.

Only 48 Gutenberg bibles still exist in the world and one sold for \$4.9 million in 1987. They were the first books to be printed with movable type in 1455 and are considered one of the rarest books in the world. The printing of the Gutenberg bibles was considered a technology revolution since this was the turning point for books being no longer written by hand. This allowed for mass production and the first easy distribution of information. Nowadays, in the digital world, we would call that "going viral" when multitudes of people are all accessing the same information at once. Imagine how it must have

felt when for the first time hundreds of people could all hold and read the exact same information at the same time instead of waiting for individually commissioned copies that were hand lettered.

The Codex Leicester by Leonardo da Vinci, is a one-of-a-kind hand drawn master artist journal that sold at auction for \$30.8 million. It is the most famous of da Vinci's scientific journals. Included in the book are theories on fossils, movement of water, and what made the moon glow. Bill Gates purchased the book at auction, had it digitally scanned, and used the scans as screen-savers for Microsoft Plus for Windows 95.

Originally 200 copies were printed of the Declaration of Independence on July 4, 1776. Today, there are only 24 original United State of America Declaration of Independence copies left. Some of the printing was done in such a hurry that residual ink marks can be seen on some of the remaining originals. One copy of the Declaration of Independence was found in 1989 behind a painting that was purchased for \$4 at

a Pennsylvania flea market because the buyer liked the frame and not the dismal dark country scene. Approximate value? About \$1 million.

Even newer books, such as those written by J.K. Rowling, to the right collector have special interest. J.K. Rowling handwrote and illustrated seven original copies of her book, "Tales of Beedle the Bard," before she mass published the book. The only copy of the seven that she put out to auction (the rest were given to friends and her editors) sold to Amazon.com in 2007 for \$3.98 million dollars.

All this just goes to show that people are fascinated by knowledge or history, and things that are perceived as rare or special will continue to gain value depending on the cultural significance. Some of these books and artifacts mentioned above will fade away with time. Others will always continue to transcend any trends and always be considered of great value or even priceless. History, art and the recording of the same, it seems that both will always be of great fascination to the human race.

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