



My Experience with 2004 Hurricane Charley

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In 2004, I was a Junior at Mariner High School in Cape Coral, FL. An interesting announcement came on the public address system on Thursday morning, August 12: all students that lived on the Lee County barrier islands needed to board buses to head home. They had been asked to evacuate ahead of Hurricane Charley and needed the time to prepare their homes and leave for higher ground. Several of my classmates had parents who were professional mariners and this storm threatened not only their homes, but their livelihoods. Once school was out for the day, everyone set home to prepare, board up windows, and evacuate if ordered to do so.

Later that evening, Charley was nearing Cuba. Since school had been cancelled for Friday, I stayed up until 2 in the morning watching the storm move across Cuba.

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Morning came with increasing clouds, gusty winds, and a potent Hurricane Charley heading for Florida. The eye of Charley eventually came into the range of the Doppler RADAR in Key West. It was impressive and scary at the same time. Where would it go? How strong would it be? Over the next several hours Charley became stronger and made its infamous right turn through my neck of the woods.

I had gotten my first cell phone less than a month before Charley. Power outages from the first round of storms ahead of the hurricane made that quickly useless as local cell phone towers lost power. The signal bars quickly faded on the phone until *No Signal* popped up on the screen. As the storm got closer, our battery-operated TV/radio became an essential lifeline. Tornado warnings blared across the NOAA Weather Radio and the worst of the storm was on its way. My parent's brand new house would see its first hurricane test.

We lived in Northwest Cape Coral, near the Charlotte-Lee County line. Sustained winds of 150 mph in the eye wall of Hurricane Charley passed a few miles to the north of my home. My family spent what felt like an eternity that afternoon securing the front door and praying that the braces holding our garage door would be able to survive. Objects were hitting the house, making loud noises and adding to the stress of the situation. Even though it was the middle of the day, the clouds and sideways rain made it feel dark.

As the storm continued to move to the northeast, the winds and rain died down. We were fortunate that our house held together as some of my friends homes were a total loss. I was already planning on becoming a meteorologist before the storm hit. Surviving Hurricane Charley only intensified my desire. When I returned to school a week later, I took all the math and science courses I could get my hands on.

