

“Help!”, I could hear the dire screams resonate throughout the inundated neighborhoods. It was nine in the morning and water was already above fences. Hurricane Harvey dealt a deafening blow to a neighborhood that regularly floods, decimating the entire neighborhood. I had a premonition about the welfare of the people in the surrounding neighborhood as I loaded myself into my friend’s boat. We motored towards muffled screams that we could hear over the drone of helicopters hovering over. People waved their hands and screamed in desperation, and we approached them with open arms. I jumped into water that was just below my nose and loaded a family with two toddlers onto the boat: our first rescue of the day.

Rescue boats with motors were nowhere to be seen: we were the only hope. Rain drops pelted my skin as we turned down streets, dodging cars we could faintly see underneath the turbid water. We took it upon ourselves to carry out the role of first responders, and people were incredulous to see four high school students conducting a rescue effort. Firefighters waded through chest deep water alongside kayaks in an effort to help people trapped in their homes; however, their attempts were limited due to the magnitude of the current flowing down the streets. On the way to pick up more people, we passed by where I had parked my truck, it was completely submerged and I was severely discontent. Despite my grief, I acknowledged that my truck is replaceable; however, life is not.

On the verge of death, two men clung to overhanging tree branches in a last-ditch effort to preserve their lives as the swift current pulled them underwater. These men worked for the City of Houston and had been driving a dump truck down streets to rescue people when their truck stalled out in the high water. They had been waiting for help and neither of them knew how to swim: we were now rescuing the rescuers. They were extremely gracious for our help, thanking us as we loaded them onto the boat. We evacuated over fifty individuals before other assistance came, including a who man told us how people refused to rescue him.

A photojournalist joined us on our precarious exploit to rescue individuals, taking pictures of our efforts and posting them on social media. We became a sensation, and people began to commend us for our valiant efforts. Recognition bolstered our morale, however, we would have done it regardless. When I

woke up that morning, I did not surmise that I was going to make the difference between life or death for some people. Other than my three friends and I, there would have been no help until the mid-afternoon, when people were already trapped in their attics as the water continued to rise. We concluded our venture when it began to get dark, and we were relieved to see National Guard trucks traversing through the flood waters.

This event has caused me to realize how vital it is to take initiative to help others during a crisis. In times of disaster all disparities, whether political, socioeconomic, or racial, do not matter. What matters is the difference between life and death and helping your fellow neighbor, because we are all on the same boat and the sea state is rough. While this flood was incredibly catastrophic, it catalyzed me to realize how valuable life is and how important it is for communities to come together in pursuit of a common goal. This event also caused me to realize how unimportant material goods are: we must not get caught up with the superfluous things in life because all of those things can be replaced, however, life cannot. We were exhausted from our intrepid efforts, yet it has prompted me to always venture to help others, even if my own life is on the line.