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Hurricane Hangover

By Andrew Malekoff

Although I am a month behind the news cycle, I have hurricane hangover. The soundtrack of my life during the build up to Irene was like the theme from *Jaws*, that universal jingle of impending doom. I live in Long Beach, close to the bay and canal and a few blocks from the ocean.

I am not one of those that thought the warnings were over-hyped or unjustified. I think it was the right thing to do, to warn people and issue orders for mandatory evacuation. I did evacuate my family. And, although we did not suffer any damage I do not regret evacuating. I felt the same way decades ago when hurricane Gloria blew in. I wanted my children then, who are young adults now, to know that they should take hurricanes seriously.

What really bothered me with Irene, was the slow and steady pace of the hurricane (think of the *Jaws* theme now) and waiting for the worst to come, waiting for the storm to broadside us at 8 a.m. on Sunday morning. It felt like a hostile force was advancing and there was little to do except to retreat to higher ground. Did you know that the meaning of the name Irene is peace?

When we reached our evacuation destination, there was no TV, only my trusty 9-volt transistor radio. I was always a transistor-radio-kid, one of those that listened to the World Series with an earplug during Hebrew School in the 1960's.

Despite the dismal weather, the reception was very good. I picked an FM station, WBAI, only to hear one caller after another posing conspiracy theories about the government using the hurricane as a pretext for testing and preparing us for mass evacuation. They speculated that the government was shutting down mass transit and telling us to leave our homes and communities as a dress rehearsal. For what, I wondered? For a foreign enemy landing on our shores or an alien invasion?

My wife and I looked at each other and the *Jaws* music in our minds suddenly switched to the ever-familiar *Twilight Zone* theme; not as ominous as *Jaws*, but somewhat more unnerving for its suggestion of something other-worldly, mysterious and, perhaps evil lurking in the shadows.

It wasn't easy to sleep. I kept switching on the transistor radio to hear what was happening. By morning, we were still waiting for "landfall," which was predicted for between 8:00 and 10:00 a.m. It was sort of anti-climactic when those two hours passed. In a few more hours, we headed home to be pleasantly surprised by having been virtually

untouched. Of course, we learned others were not so fortunate and suffered significant loss of property, power and peace of mind. And, in some cases, loss of life.

As soon as I got home, I headed up to the boardwalk on my bike to check out the scene there. I passed fallen trees and heard sirens headed for house fires ignited by fallen wires. I struggled for the two miles going west with strong winds in my face.

On the way back, I had the pleasant surprise of traveling two miles without having to pedal even one revolution. There was a powerful wind at my back that carried me the entire way home to the imagined soundtrack of *Chariots of Fire*.