

Marcella Fernandez

February 23, 2013

Dear WKU Administration,

I would like to first express my appreciation for you and the WKU administration to be so thoughtful in reaching out to me to get an idea of what one of their distance learning students experienced during the catastrophic storm of 2012, Storm Sandy and her aftermath of absolute destruction.

The nerve racking days leading up to the great storm of 2012 were spent in preparation- as the news coverage was spread about the potential for a massive storm surge with fierce winds and rapidly rising sea waters, the people in my community grew increasingly frantic and wiped the major “box” stores in my area out of basic necessities- water, flashlights, batteries, bread, canned foods, blankets, etc. Despair, fear, and anxiety cast their shadow over our community during that time. Many of us surrounded the outside of our homes with sandbags and secured boats and canoes to our homes in the event the waters rushed into them. At the time, I was enrolled in Dysphagia and Language Disorders in the WKU distance learning Communication Disorders graduate program and secured my binders, books, and research articles in my car! The New Jersey shore is the land that I call home, it is located in the southern end of the state and is home to people from all socioeconomic realities- second generation fishermen, small business owners, teachers, cranberry farmers, even rock stars Bruce Springsteen and Bon Jovi. In addition to our unique makeup of people, we have a strong community of dedicated rescue workers, such as firefighters and police officers that train hard and devote their time to lending a hand to its people in times of crisis.

With the full moon casting its glow over the high tide, Storm Sandy pushed the storm surge into my town and in her wake; she swallowed ENTIRE houses and left NO trace of them! There are currently empty lots with no evidence; save for gas lines, that homes ever existed there. The gas lines were quite a concern for us post storm. With many lines broken and exposed, there were fires that raged for nearly a week and with

roads blocked with massive piles of debris, including entire boats and even docks that washed ashore, fire trucks and gas company vehicles could not make their way to extinguish the flames. Every marina that houses boats in my town lost entire docks and boats were stacked on top of each other like toy blocks and pushed onto pilings and land, even ending up in people's homes! Most people in my town sustained a loss or damage to their property in the form of a flooded home filled with the most rancid smelling seawater you could imagine permeating years of renovations, family heirlooms, furniture of all kinds, clothing, etc. and/or damage or loss of their vehicles. We were without power for longer than any of us would have cared for and many of us evacuated to shelters further inland with the handful that didn't getting rescued by the National Guard as the flood waters quickly rose around us.

The aftermath of Storm Sandy cannot be quantified in the few words I am writing here; it has been utter devastation. People have lost most if not all of their worldly possessions including homes and some even lost their lives in the storm. It took from October to the end of December to clear away the major chunks of debris- entire contents of homes, pieces of torn apart homes, broken docks washed up into dry land, entire air conditioning units and boilers just lying in the street, seawalls just broken apart and scattered like popcorn along the beach; if one saw a snapshot and didn't know it was a storm, they would assume that a nuclear warhead was dropped here. The community received tremendous assistance from volunteers and organizations of all kinds and from miles away - church groups, private companies- even the Amish from Pennsylvania. It is quite touching that complete strangers, many of whom had never swung a hammer in their life made their way here and worked in filthy, rancid, muddy conditions to help us in the clean-up process. It's hard to imagine that we'd be in the rebuilding process at the moment without the love they showed to us. I am personally thankful for empathy and concern that my professors at WKU, Dr. Lauren Bland and Janice Smith, M.A., CCC-SLP demonstrated at that very difficult time. They extended deadlines and provided words of encouragement; it was a relief that I could temporarily focus on getting my home and life back to a semi-normal state without the added pressures that advanced coursework presents. It speaks volumes about the

spirit of WKU- placing value and offering support to students when they need it! Although I lost personal belongings to the storm, sustained damage to my vehicle from the salt water, and recently received a pay cut at my job due to the storms impact of the finances of the small business I work in, I do my best to look past the obstacles and maintain a positive attitude because I know that by continuing my studies at WKU, my future is promising and shines bright in the horizon!

Very Truly Yours,

Marcella Fernandez

Graduate Student

Communication Disorders

Cohort 8-Distance Learning









