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TROPICAL DEPRESSION - MINE

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MY WORD

The tropical non-events of the past week have hurled me to the edge of paradise and into a tropical depression. First there was Floyd, who threatened to wreak havoc on our homes and loved ones - at least according to local news reports. Then, right on his heels came weaker brother Harvey, who promised to cut a path across Central Florida.

Schools and offices were closed. Homes were prepared. Many spent sleepless nights in shelters and with relatives while we all awaited the arrivals of, first, Floyd and, then, Harvey. We should feel lucky, right? After all, no one really wanted either of these storms to hit us. Why, then, am I so depressed?

I'll tell you.

Where else in the country do schools announce closings days in advance?

Many of us can remember snow days in other parts of the country, where we were notified the morning of the closing, based on weather conditions. Not in Central Florida. Many working parents were left in the lurch with these cancellations. Although a day off to prepare for the possibility of a major hurricane such as Floyd was probably wise, was it really necessary to close schools automatically for two days before we knew what the impact would be?

Certainly with Harvey, school districts could have waited until morning before deciding to cancel classes.

Then, there was the television coverage. It was intense and silly. One station had a reporter on the shores of Lake Monroe in Sanford, covering wave action - get real. The only waves on Lake Monroe were from boaters waving at the camera as they enjoyed an afternoon on the lake. And how many times did you watch the Daytona Beach pier collapsing? It was the only game in town.

Almost dead from boredom, I took my son to the mall the second day that school was closed last week - after it was clear that Floyd wasn't coming near us - only to find that it was closed until 2 p.m. Went over to Steak n' Shake to get lunch, and it was closed too. Do you see a pattern here? Did anyone ever consider the fact that Floyd might not hit and that employees should be on notice to come to work in that event?

No, because the news-media hype was so intense that we were all resigned to the fact that death and destruction were imminent.

And I guess that's where the real stress originated. Let's face it: We were all scared. And then, when nothing happened, along with relief came depression - Depression No. 10 to be exact. But this time the news media noticeably toned down their coverage. However, when the depression turned into Tropical Storm Harvey, the cycle started again. Schools were closed as we were warned that Harvey would maintain its course and make its way across Central Florida.

Was there an overreaction by school officials? The reason given for closing schools in the case of Harvey was concern about the safety of kids waiting at bus stops. Was anyone concerned about the safety of kids who had to be left home alone so their parents could go to work? Are some attempting to prove that the investments they've made in technology to predict weather are worth it? That plan's awash right now.

That's what I'm really depressed about. It's a dangerous game we're playing here. I think we all need to try to consider the facts more carefully. The news media should report the facts not enhance them. The meteorologists should realize that the expensive, high-tech tools for predicting weather are not perfect. And we all should watch less television and ask more questions.

Until then, tropical depression will be a way of life in Florida.

Memo: Susan Long, a writer, lives in Winter Park.

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