

## Emory Nursing Alum Faces down Hurricane Charley

**Lisa Hooper '03N** lived in the Bahamas for ten years without experiencing a hurricane. But on Friday, August 13, while working at Charlotte Regional Medical Center in Punta Gorda, Florida, she found herself in the path of Charley, a level-four hurricane with 145 mile per hour winds at its peak.

Charley claimed twenty-five lives, shredded mobile homes, uprooted trees, downed power lines, and damaged tens of thousands of businesses and homes in southwest Florida.

"I came ahead in to work about 2 p.m., after the storm had been upgraded to a level four," says the thirty-nine-year-old Hooper, who returned to college to pursue nursing as a second career. "At first, I thought we'd be helping to take care of victims from the Tampa and St. Pete areas. But as it turned out, the storm jogged and we were in the direct path."

Hooper assisted in the evacuation of the hospital's bottom floor, as well as the ER, the ICU, cardiac recovery, X-ray, the lab, and the pharmacy, in case of a storm surge. She helped move a patient in a halo device who was recovering from spinal surgery.

An impromptu daycare center was set up at the hospital for employees' children; many brought in their pets as well.

"At 2:30, it was like a regular storm, but by 3:30, we started getting the winds. We were covering the windows in the hall with mattresses, chairs, and equipment," says Hooper, who was taking care of thirty-eight patients on the four-story hospital's top floor. "When the windows on the floor below us started to blow in, we got all the patients out and into the hallway."

Hospital staff had already shut off the electricity and gone to generators, says Hooper, who watched as the building's industrial-sized air conditioning units blew away. "Everything outside was blowing horizontally-the wind, the rain, trees that had been uprooted. . . . The patients did pretty good as long as we did pretty good. But one of our technicians lives across the street [from the hospital] and when we saw her house get blown away, it got a little emotional."

After the hurricane's eye passed, the winds started battering the hospital from the other side. "One of our employees had to hold in a window while we were getting patients out of the room," Hooper says. "The windows didn't shatter, they just blew out of their frames. We had towels and blankets in front of the doors so water wouldn't come in. At about 5:30 or 6 p.m., it was still light outside and you could see all the devastation."

When the storm subsided, the temporary ER began filling with victims. Hooper helped bring in a man who was lying on a twin mattress in a pickup truck, his leg almost severed below the knee by flying debris.

Maintenance crews cleared streets for emergency vehicles, and Charlotte Regional's patients began to be evacuated to other hospitals, including Tampa General and Sarasota Memorial. By mid-morning Saturday, nearly all the patients had been relocated, and the hospital-severely damaged by the storm-was preparing to close for a week so repairs could be made.

More than a third of the hospital's employees either lost or suffered severe damage to their homes. Hooper's condominium, which is on a canal less than three miles from the hospital, was on the lower floor of a building that lost its roof, but she was able to save most of her belongings.

"The important thing is that we didn't lose one single patient. No one got injured at the hospital," says Hooper, who stayed with friends in Tampa after the storm. "At home, there's no water, and it's going to be weeks before power is restored. But I love Punta Gorda, it's like the island life of the Bahamas--a nice tight-knit little community. Everyone is pulling together and rebuilding."-M.J.L.