

Hi Worth & Susan,

My name is Natasha Vidal, and I was at our family cabin during this horrific storm. I heard that you are looking for stories from the Cattailers that were there during the storm. Percy built my grandparents cabin in 1964. My grandparents were Harold & Emily Bliven. It's the A-Frame cabin across from Penny Park at 15 Penny Park Rd. I spent summers in Cattail during my youth and they were the best times of my life. I'm 56 years old, and it has been 25 years since I made it back up. This past summer in July I was able to take my grandkids for the first time for their summer vacation and they had a marvelous time. I'm so glad they got to see the Cattail Creek I remembered and love so much. When I returned home to Miami from that vacation, I decided since I work remote and Miami being so hot, that I would return to the cabin for 2 months (September & October). I was having the time of my life until that horrific day that I will NEVER forget. It has changed me profoundly, as I'm sure it has many in our community.

Thursday night, 9/26 was my last text with Carol Beals, Molly Seacrest and Meghan Weber. We had a group chat to check-in with each other the next day if we lost power. I figured if I did, I would go to Carol's house to use the landline. It had been raining for 2 days but not hard rain, just a constant light rain. I'm from Florida and I'm used to powerful rainstorms. I lost power at 1:30AM. I hardly slept that night but woke up at 7AM and noticed I had some water leaks coming from the roof in the living area and from the windows, nothing major though. As it started to get daylight outside around 7:30 AM, the winds started to pick up. At that point I noticed the creek was roaring and getting higher and higher, it was starting to get full of mud. The back of our cabin is about 5 feet from the cliff and at a slope. For what seemed like hours, I walked from the back to the front of the cabin, as there were mudslides starting to come up the driveway. Our bridge was wiped out. The front and back of our cabin are all windows. I could see the creek getting higher and higher. At 9:30 AM the very large trees are starting to fall and tumble down the creek and what sounded like thunder were the boulders tumbling down the mountain. I kept running back and forth. At that point I was scared out of my mind and made a video to my children and grandchildren to say my goodbyes. I honestly didn't think I would survive. I got down on my knees and begged the good lord to save me. I was not ready to die. The mudslides kept forming up the driveway and I just knew if they reached the cabin, that it would be swept away down the cliff, or a landslide would take me out. I could see the mudslides forming down the mountain across the creek on the backside and could only wonder if they were forming on my side under my cabin as well and the ground would give out and the cabin would collapse. This lasted for another 2 hours and eventually the wind and rain subsided at about 11:30 AM. I made it!!!! I had survived and so did my doggie Dewey who kept me from going off the deep end.

I emerged from my cabin to go get help but quickly found out that I was stranded. My driveway was full of mud from all the mudslides and my bridge was gone. In fact, new water paths had formed. The water was too high and dangerous for me to attempt to cross. Plus, all the twisted trees and boulders were everywhere and there was nowhere I could cross. Miraculously though, our

cabin and the immediate surrounding area were untouched. The chairs, bench, picnic table, firewood had not even blown away or moved. My car was fine. Only a few tree limbs had fallen. It was truly a miracle. I know my grandparents were looking after me and this home they built in this magical place. I then walked up the path between my cabin and the cabin above me (Brett), the last cabin on Penny Park Rd. I went to check on their bridge to cross over and it was also gone. The water was too high and there was no way I could get across. So, I figured one of the ladies would come and check on me if they had not heard from me. At 1:30 PM, I attempted to call 911 and was able to connect to a satellite emergency. It's via text and they asked for my location, and they let me know that they notified Yancey County. I have my mom and children set up as my emergency contacts on my phone, therefore, they can see the texts between me and the emergency service, so at least they knew I had made it through the storm and was alive. As it started to get dark, I began to wonder what the storm had done. All I could see was the immediate area around my cabin and the cabin above and neither of our cabins were damaged. I didn't sleep a wink that night and made my way out at 8 AM on Saturday, 9/28 as soon as it was daylight. I attempted once again to cross my bridge, but the gap was too deep and wide to cross, so again I went to the cabin above and the water had receded, and I prayed I wouldn't slip and fall, and I made it across. I was jumping for joy but that was short lived. As I started to walk down and past Penny Park, I noticed the trees that had fallen, as I continued that's when I ran into Kristian Baran coming down Ogles Gap Rd and Tennis Court, I fell to my knees and just started crying. He hugged me and told me how bad it was, and I wasn't going to believe what happened. As we continued down Tennis Court Rd, I could not believe my eyes. It was like we were in the middle of a war zone and a bomb went off. Something you would see in a movie. Now I knew why the ladies had not come to check on me. The next cabin down was Molly Seacrest and Larry Katz. I just started crying profusely, I thought they were dead. My heart sank... The whole mountain just collapsed and took half of their cabin with it. I told Kristian they were there, and he made the treacherous trek up the landslide, but no one was there. Thank God! Our next step was figuring out how to get across that area as the whole mountain had collapsed and blocked what was left of Tennis Court Rd. We could see in the distance some people on the balcony of William & Mary Meehan's place. We had to hike through the woods, through the knee-deep mud, mangled trees and rocks. We got to the Plumber-Flick red house on Tennis Court and Cold Springs Rd. The landslide took out half their house and Larry & Molly's car looked like a crumpled-up tin can mixed with all the debris, trees and boulders that smashed right through the red house. At this point we run into William & Mary Meehan and Amy, Tommy & Ivie Buchanan Fitzgerald. We just all hugged each other. I had never met them, but we became instant family after what we experienced. I was so glad to see Larry & Molly and their dog Haven. They made it out the back door of their cabin at 10AM down the mountain to the Meehan's as the storm was going on. I cannot even imagine what they went through as they saw the whole mountain collapsing. Next, I saw my friend Carol Beals, our families go back many generations, and she was a bit shaken up but thankfully she survived. She treated me to some cooked fresh eggs on the grill and we just sat on the porch not believing what just happened and how we made it out alive. Lance and Amanda Taylor stopped by to check on her as well. Carol graciously asked if I wanted to spend the night, and I took her up on that offer. I was not going to hike back up that treacherous terrain to my place. Carol now has creek front property in the front.

The next morning, Sunday, 9/29, Carol and I ventured out to see how far I could make it. I walked down Tennis Court Rd, or what was Tennis Court Rd as all the roads were obliterated and there are new waterways that have formed where the roads used to be. It was a challenge walking and luckily, I brought my walking stick with me, you had to poke the ground because of all the mud to get your footing and not fall. I got to Mighty Mouse bridge and was glad to see the slab made it. It was full of fallen trees, rocks and debris but the slab was still there. I was able to cross and make it up to Deep Gap Rd but I didn't make it far. The culvert on Deep Gap Rd was gone. I then ran into Diana Sweet and West Birch. Such wonderful, amazing people. I also ran into Tom Huston. We all had our stories to tell. I then went back down Tennis Court Rd and made my way up Cold Springs Rd. I was glad to see Ann Woodard and her son Chad. They didn't have too much damage, except for some mud and water in their basement. She had a generator and told me if I wanted to take a shower, I was welcome to. I ended up spending the day with the families on Cold Springs Rd. Diana Sweet made us a fabulous lunch and we held a much-needed prayer beforehand. I met and spent time with Dawn & Matt Sechevich and their 3 kids, Carolyn Von Zimmerman and her daughter Emeline and fiancé Joey. Matt was already hard at work getting the road repaired on Cold Springs Rd. with his heavy equipment. The Cold Springs Rd bridge just collapsed, and we all did not know how we would get across. The water was very high and flowing extremely fast. We were locked in with all bridges and roads pretty much gone. We thought it would be at least a week before anyone came for us. But after lunch, we heard helicopters and ran out waving our hands on Diana Sweet's front lawn. It was the National Guard, and they waved back and acknowledged us. The overwhelming relief that came over me is hard to explain. They circled a bunch more times and we heard that it seemed they landed nearby. Matt was eventually able to cross the creek and see them at the Baden house. He came back and told us they wanted to know of any immediate medical necessities and if anyone was injured. Also, a list of medications everyone needed. They thought they would start taking us out by helicopter the next day, so before it got dark, I hiked up through the mud, rocks and mangled trees with Dewey back up to my cabin to make the difficult decision in deciding what I could carry in my laptop bag. It had been 2 days since I called 911 so I decided to try again so my daughter could at least know that I was still alive. I was able to connect to satellite and emergency service. I gave them my location again and told them I saw the National Guard and they told me they were working on a plan. They asked me if I wanted them to call someone and they called my daughter and relayed messages back and forth between us. My daughter relayed they were doing everything in their power to get to me, and my granddaughter told me she loved me. That made me feel so much better. I ended up sitting in the car listening to the radio for 3 hours before it got completely dark. I needed connection with the outside world. The radio station was out of Asheville and after 4 days of no communication with the outside world, I heard what this storm did to Western North Carolina. They were saying the floods were biblical proportions and there were many missing and dead. I could not believe my ears. I grieved for North Carolina. I could not stop crying. I also began to wonder what the storm did to my home state of Florida.

I hardly slept a wink Sunday night and as soon as it was daylight on Monday, 9/30, I started cleaning out the fridge. I went down to my collapsed bridge, which was now the creek, and filled up 2 jugs of water to flush out the toilet. I then packed up all my clothes, shoes and toiletries in 2 large suitcases. I double bagged the dirty laundry so critters wouldn't get in it. The only items I was able

to carry on my person were my work laptop, jewelry, change of clothes and my crocs. My feet were waterlogged and muddy from hiking for 4 days and I knew I would need a change of shoes. I also packed 2 peanut butter and jelly sandwiches and food and snacks for Dewey. I then tidied up the cabin not knowing when I would be able to return. I made one last walk through and video. It was about 11:30AM when I looked up at the front window and saw a group of people at the end of my driveway on the other side of my bridge. I ran out screaming to let them know I was there. The calvary had come to rescue me. There were 2 local bear hunters, a local couple and a sheriff from Stanly County. Boy was I happy to see them. The 2 local hunters graciously offered to carry my laptop bag and bag of essentials while I hiked with Dewey. The 2 local hunters hiked down with me, while the remainder of the group continued up the mountain to check all the cabins. I thank God they carried my belongings because I don't think I would've made it down with Dewey and my bag, while hiking in that terrain. We stopped at Carol Beal's house on the way down to pick her up. We hiked down Cold Springs Rd and at the creek crossing they had an ATV and they placed a wood plank to cross the creek. There were several other sheriffs from Stanly County there and they were walking through Cattail checking on all the cabins to rescue everyone who wanted to leave. Matt was a tremendous help making a path for the ATV. I said my goodbyes to all my fellow Cattail survivors and said see ya later and be safe. We will always have a bond for the trauma we all went through. We had a short walk down to the Baden house where the helicopter from the National Guard was waiting for us. Amy Buchanan gave me a huge hug as I got onto the chopper with Dewey. Carol Beals and her dog Buddy, and Mark Huber were also on the chopper with me. As we took off on our way to the Burnsville Fire Dept we could see some of the devastation of Pensacola. There are no words to describe what we were witnessing. I still can't believe it. Eventually, later that day we were transferred to Blue Ridge Elementary, which was set up as a shelter. There was so much chaos, as you can imagine. They were just getting organized. They didn't allow dogs in the building, so we sat outside, and we had to put our dogs in crates that the Animal Shelter provided. The cafeteria was set up with drinks, snacks and hot food. It was the first hot meal I had in 5 days and boy was it good. A few hours passed and Carol's son, Tim Beals, comes walking up and Carol just falls into Tim's arms for a hug that seemed to last forever. He then looked at me and said you are coming with me. Your family and I have been in contact. I later found out; all our families had been in contact behind the scenes through Facebook getting all the information they could and trying to figure out how to get us out of there. Thank God for Cattail Creek, Pensacola and Burnsville Facebook groups. That was how our families connected and were able to communicate. Kristian Baran also got a ride with us. As his fiancé, Tiffany would later pick him up that night. She was out of town during the storm. We had a 3-hour drive to Tim's house in SC. We could see the damage to Asheville from the highway. Truly devastating. Tim and his wife Pam hosted me that night. I had a delicious hot meal and took a long hot shower; it had been 4 days. I will be forever grateful for their hospitality. My mom, who lives 2 hours from Tim, picked me up the next morning. We were so glad to see each other. I stayed the rest of the week with my mom. I was extremely exhausted, overwhelmed and hadn't slept in a week. My doctor ended up prescribing me some meds to sleep. I finally made my way back home to Miami. Just in time to hear about another hurricane, Milton was on its way.

End of my story!