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SRLIFE9/05

## The Disunited States of America

— By Joan Z. Shore —

The irony of the Gulf Coast disaster almost exceeds the tragedy.

The richest, most powerful, most technologically advanced nation in the world has been devastated by a foreseeable stroke of nature which it refused to prepare for, and which it could not, ultimately, cope with.

Property and possessions—everything dear to a fragile consumer society—have been swept away. The first victims, as always, were the poor and underprivileged, but the bell tolled for everyone as fear and anger quickly turned to lawlessness and violence and insanity.

Imagine looting a store to steal a television set for a home that no longer exists.

Imagine police shooting the looters while people are frantically screaming for help.

Imagine a president who doesn't step foot on Ground Zero until a week later. Would he have sent aid more speedily if the victims were his wealthy cronies and campaign donors? When Rita arrived, threatening his home state, he moved a bit faster.

We are seeing the underbelly of a dysfunctional nation, a nation that is bloated and floundering in its wastefulness and neglect. America's Gulf Coast looks like the Third World, with tens of thousands of refugees and displaced persons, others sick and dying, or dead. We've seen pictures like this from Africa and Asia. But this was no tsunami sweeping over beaches and villages and pretty resorts; this was a hurricane hitting a major city and tearing apart the urban infrastructure of innumerable towns, drowning highways, slashing power lines, and severing communications.

Offers of foreign aid poured in (imagine America needing foreign aid!) while the American government flailed about. It has squandered billions of dollars on a needless, tragic war but had neither the resources

nor the intelligence nor the compassion to respond adequately to a crisis at home. When Germany and Britain sent over tons of food rations, they were refused on grounds that foreign food might be unsafe! Foreign doctors offering to help were turned away because they were not covered

*The richest, most powerful, most technologically advanced nation in the world has been devastated by a foreseeable stroke of nature...*

by American insurance plans! But in an effort to salvage some sunken, rotting boats, a team of French divers was welcomed in.

Where is the logic in all this? Where is the humanity?

And where is the will and the muscle that could have, that should have, organized the relief efforts? Off in Iraq, some said ruefully. Dispersed and disabled among conflicting bureaucracies—local, state and federal—said other analysts. Detached and indifferent, say the African-Americans who suffered most.

Were our leaders, like us, simply sitting numb and dumb in front of the television?

Americans used to say, "It can't happen here," with a certain smug complacency. But it did happen in September 2001 and it has happened again four years later. Whether the disaster is man-made or natural, America is short-sighted, vulnerable, and unprepared. When will we learn that the good life, the secure life, is not floating casinos and NASCAR races, but a social structure that supports the environment and the people in it?

*Joan Z. Shore lives in Paris and Ft. Lauderdale and is the author of "Saging—How to Grow Older and Wiser" which is available at Books & Books (Coral Gables), the Classic Bookstore (Palm Beach) and by e-mail: [joanzshore@yahoo.com](mailto:joanzshore@yahoo.com)*



Joan Z. Shore

### GENEALOGY

## Cindy Sue, *The Genealogy Detective*

The tension rises as the background music swells. Who will survive the oldest reality show of all time, Life? The ultimate players in this game are your ancestors. What were their goals, where did they come from and what did they accomplish to succeed at life?

Answers to these and other questions may be discovered when you enter the world of genealogy. Before you begin the quest, you must be prepared. Start with the basics: ring binder, paper and pen. The first step is to record what you know about your immediate family and relatives. At a later date you will want to verify the accuracy of this information with copies of birth certificates, marriage licenses and death certificates.

#### Basic information to record per person:

1. Full name, date and place of birth. If deceased, date and place of death, including a cemetery.
2. Spouse: date and place of marriage. If divorced or remarried, date and place of divorce or new marriage.
3. Children: date and place of birth.
4. Schools attended: date and place.
5. Military service: dates of service.

The next step is to interview your oldest relatives. Don't leave this resource untapped. If you have an older family member, they might remember information about their grandparents and even great-grandparents. Every scrap of information you gather now will save you many hours in the future trying to track down these relatives.

Contact out-of-town relatives with a letter explaining your interest in the family history. With the letter include a form that can be filled out with the requested information. Make it a simple questionnaire and it will generate a better response rate.

Don't despair if you don't receive an answer to your request. My mother sent a letter to a distant cousin and didn't receive a response for six months. Suddenly the cousin found he was going to be bedridden for several months and had decided that researching the family would help pass the time.

One important point to remember is that not everyone will be willing to answer your questions. Please respect your relative's privacy. Don't be surprised if you hit a brick wall, not everyone wants the skeletons in their closets rattled.

These simple but necessary steps to collect data will soon have you playing the family reality show starring your ancestors. Remember to bring along your supplies because it is a genealogy jungle out there.

*Cindy Sue is a romance author and a nationally syndicated columnist specializing in genealogy, antiques and crafts. E-mail her at: [CindySueWrites@aol.com](mailto:CindySueWrites@aol.com)*

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Cindy Sue Blair

## Keeping Kittens Healthy From The Start

A growing number of Americans now think cats are the purrrfect pet. The frisky felines have passed dogs as the most popular pet in America (77 million cats compared to 65 million dogs) and approximately 34 million U.S. households own at least one cat.

With the number of cats jumping in the U.S., and more people bringing home kittens than in the past, vets say it's especially important for pet owners to learn about their cat's health.

"One of the most important things that cat owners can do to ensure their pet's health is to have them tested for feline immunodeficiency virus (FIV), the feline version of HIV, and feline leukemia virus (FeLV)," explained Lynn Buzhardt, D.V.M., a national veterinary expert. "FIV and FeLV are two of the most deadly retroviruses affecting cats."

The American Association of Feline Practitioners recommends testing all newly adopted cats and kittens for FIV and FeLV. Yet it's estimated that 31

million cats in the U.S. are at risk for the diseases and only a small percentage of cats are being tested. (Both diseases affect only cats and cannot be spread to people.)

#### Early Detection Is Key

There are often no visible signs of FIV and FeLV; the only way to know if a cat is infected is to test. "The good news is, with early detection, veterinarians can implement appropriate health care protocols for positive cats to keep them happy and healthy longer," explained Dr. Buzhardt. "By knowing their cat's status, pet owners can also play an important role in curtailing the spread of FIV and FeLV by monitoring their cat's behavior around other felines and by isolating positive cats when necessary."

For more information regarding FIV and FeLV, cat owners should contact their veterinarian. — NAPS

