



pz's perspective

focus on the silver lining

by: Pz
photo by: Solus Creations

What a time of tragedy and upheaval this has been for our country. As Americans we helplessly watched as a hurricane of mammoth proportions slammed our Gulf Coast and utterly obliterated entire cities. By now we have all seen the horrific scenes, initially created by the unforgiving potency of the storm, followed, shortly thereafter, by the unforgivable impotence of our nation's leaders, replayed over and over until we either wanted to cry or scream or just divorce ourselves from the human race altogether. No matter how you call it—from the bottom up to the top down—there is no level of government, no person of authority, exempt from accountability. And if all that weren't pitiful enough there were victims who, in their darkest hour, were again victimized by the worst of the worst among us. No conceivable explanation can be put forward to justify the vile actions of those thugs who preyed upon their neighbors, stole from their community, and shot at their rescuers. Decent, innocent people were trapped like sheep alongside a pack of wolves by a series of inept decisions that will someday be evaluated but never really understood. It's a mixture of heartbreak and disgrace tossed together with a scoop of I can't believe this is America and topped off with a dollop of outrage blended into one big basin of toxic sludge.

The disheartening thing about Katrina is that the predicted disaster brought on by nature was out side of our control while the response that ended up so abysmally bungled was supposed to be something we had within our command. Turns out we didn't. When events like Katrina expectedly unfold in such an unexpected way they grip the nation at her jugular and our entire focus gets diverted. Not since 9/11 has the country been so totally shaken on such an enormous scale.

Societies only work and thrive when all the links in the chain are as strong as they can possibly be. Should one of the links weaken and is not shored up—like the levees in New Orleans, it eventually breaks and in doing so opens up more than just flood gates. It throws the entire system into a tailspin, in many ways weakening the other links in the chain. For a time it is as though we are all victims of the same storm, all



begin to question civilization as a whole and life as we know it. As the days pass, the outcries of the masses lead to an outpouring of help and hope whereupon humanity musters the troops, opens their hearts and wallets; the unstable become more stable, and a new normalcy slowly emerges from the ruins.

Thankfully there is already clear and present evidence that the response has finally caught up with the need and the healing has been set in motion. We can begin to exhale again after having held one collective breath through it all. Life goes on. It must.

Of course, the folks battered personally by this event have an uncertain road ahead. The country has a long road to hoe as well. The geography of a complete region of the United States of America has been altered. A large portion of our citizenry has been displaced. States and lives have to be rebuilt. Billions of dollars and just as many man hours devoted to the enterprise will be needed.

floundering around waiting for the cavalry—waiting to be saved. The plight of the few had trickled down to become the plight of the many—to those who are caring and conscious enough to be affected. We

Many important decisions that surround this disaster will affect our country's future. We have to begin to make some sense out of a natural disaster gone wild. We have to begin to address this man-made disaster that didn't happen over a few days, but has been brewing for a few decades. We have to be honest enough to face the welfare state that has long existed in the state of Louisiana and what we can do to solve it. We have to break the issues down into their proper category of class, poverty, malfunction and corruption. The 'haves' need to figure out how they can best help the 'have-nots' so there is less dependence on government and more onus on the individual. We, too, have to remember the storm crippled more than just New Orleans, and those in surrounding parishes, cities, and states who have gotten far less focus cannot be left out of the debate.

Still, in the midst of this blow—we can't forget other large scale problems that remain, like the war in Iraq, the continued threat we have come to know as terrorism and countless other pressing issues both at home and abroad that will require our attention for years to come. How consumed do we become by one tragedy and is there enough focus left to go around? Every situation gives us a chance to learn; every incident a chance to get the lesson within. This catastrophe is no exception. We have been given a golden opportunity. How can we best use it and is there a silver lining somewhere beneath all the rubble?

PZ'S POINTERS FOR FOCUSING ON THE SILVER LINING

Take an inventory of YOUR life—You might live in Maine or Wisconsin or Hawaii. This disaster might not touch you geographically, but it does on many other fronts. One thing you can take away for yourself is an inventory of your own life. Stop and focus on where you are in the grand scheme. Are you where you need to be professionally, personally, physically, financially, and spiritually? Tragedies like this can be a HUGE reminder that tomorrow is not promised and tomorrow can quickly look different than we anticipated today. Examine your life with regard to your purpose for being here. Are you on the right path? Are you doing the best for yourself and living up to your highest calling? Your wake up call can be heard from as far away as the strip in Biloxi or from the streets of the French Quarter if you take the time to listen.

Focus energies on you—Who were the first people who were a visible force on the scene in the disaster zones? — Celebrities. People like Oprah and John Travolta and Sean Penn and Julia Roberts and Matthew McConaughey and Faith Hill and Harry Connick, Jr. have the means and the notoriety to pull strings, cut through red tape, and make things happen. They have achieved success on a scale that enables them to make the loudest noise in times as these. Musicians and entertainers quickly came together to offer their voices and faces to raise funds, supplies, and awareness. They get media attention because of who they are. In times of crisis this is a good thing. A close second are the volunteers like fireman and police and doctors and nurses who traveled to the area to lend their brains and their brawn to the effort. Now the big money guns are coming through with millions in donations. Two ex-Presidents are involved. That's also a good thing. They should because they can. What about you? What gifts or talents do you possess? What are you able to give? I'm not talking just about money—although every little bit does matter. Focus your energies on making your life as big a success as you are capable. Place your attention on the aspects of life that come together to make you a healthy, productive, and prosperous human being. You can't extend your strengths or service or resources to others if you haven't any to offer.

Good times vs. bad—You're a body builder and your goal is to win on the competitive stage. Think about how difficult it is to stay on track with your routine. You can't live your life like the average Joe—that won't cut it. Your focus has to be everything and anything that surrounds achieving that goal. How you eat, how you train, how you sleep, how you support your endeavor, how you fit your other obligations into that schedule can be a challenge under the best conditions. Focus is hard enough to keep when life is going well. When something happens to upset that positive forward motion it's even harder to stay the course. Winners in life find a way to make it happen during good times and bad. Winners find a way to get the job done.

Expect for and anticipate the interruptions—Life doesn't run in one continuous calm current. There will most certainly be times when that flow will be interrupted. Katrina is a real and tangible disaster that can serve as a

metaphor for all our lives. When situations take you from smooth sailing to troubled waters you have to be ready. Most of us are caught with our pants down when lightning strikes. Don't be surprised when the tide shifts. This doesn't mean you sit idly on the shoreline and focus on the bad knowing it's just past the next wave. Learn to expect that stuff happens, things go wrong, and no one is immune. Learn to accept that bad things DO happen to good people. When you live your life from that premise than you are better equipped to handle anything life throws in your direction.

It's all in the handling—Just as you come to expect that life is made up of those undeniable opposites, it's how you handle the difficult times when the chips are down that makes the difference. No matter the circumstance, if you are able to handle hardship and turmoil with dignity and grace you will be much further ahead. If you are able to remain cool under fire you will become a much better problem solver. That doesn't mean some instances don't call for extreme measures. Sometimes you have to stand up and stomp your feet. Sometimes you have to take control and take charge. You can behave in this fashion and still remain on your plane. Problems are never easy, but they can be made easier if you learn how to act rather than react. Coming unglued only fuels the flame. Some of the hardest hit folks of the storm showed the greatest patience and resolve in the face of such disbelief. That's a lesson we could all take away. It's inevitable that the best laid plans go awry, but grace under fire takes you further to solving a situation than any other reaction.

A stronger you makes a stronger world—As Nietzsche said, 'That which does not kill us makes us stronger' can only apply if we make it so. Some will survive this crisis and win that skirmish, but lose the war. Their lives will be splintered such that they won't find all the pieces to be made whole—like some of the vets from Vietnam who still suffer from their post traumatic stress syndrome. People break under pressure. Look at some of the NOPD who abandoned their job and their city when they were needed most. Some of these cops, I'm sure, had legitimate reasons; some didn't and just panicked and ran—some actually took their own lives. Those who stayed did so out of duty, obligation, and strength of character that comes from deep inside. It's that strength—mind, body, and spirit—we can rely on

to pull us through. It was sadly evident that many of the people in the Superdome and Convention Center were on the lower rung of the socioeconomic ladder and not in the healthiest state. The old and the young alike had an even more difficult time since they were poor and in such poor condition. Keep your body in good shape. Whatever exercise regimen works for you is the one to stick with. Keep at it. With all the wonderful options there is no excuse not to improve your diet. We know the statistics about the pickle Americans are in over their weight. We're a fat country. We can do better. A healthy body makes for a healthier attitude. With all the possibilities ahead for us to face we're going to need to be strong.

Never too much preparation—Ask 35yr-old Agassi what got him to the finals at the US Open this year and he'll tell you he worked his butt-off to make it. Although he didn't win—Federer was just too good—he is still a winner. The intensity of play he displayed was obvious to any observer that he couldn't have been more prepared. That reason alone makes you respect him all the more. When a person does their best and gives their all—that's all they can do. Not only was Andre prepared he was also able to execute. Even Roger admitted after the match how well Andre had performed and gave him nothing but high praise. Then there's the Federer Express, the #1 guy in men's tennis. This Swiss machine epitomizes the pay-offs that come with preparation. His game is so well-rounded and oiled due to tireless work on honing those skills. Andre took him all over the court and he had an answer. Whatever plans were in place for a crisis like Katrina didn't seem to matter. Whoever tried to implement those plans wasn't prepared to face the slings and arrows that came out of nowhere. They weren't able to shift gears or turn on a dime and adapt to the evolving situation. When you prepare and execute you have to have a shot at the brass ring. Otherwise, what's the point at even showing up? Approach your life with the same amount of gusto and zeal as Agassi and Federer. Devote the focus necessary to take your game to its highest level.

Hitting on all the right keys—Jamie Foxx won the Academy Award for his compelling role in the movie 'Ray.' During rehearsals he sat down to practice

Continued on page 48

continued from page 27

with the ailing legend. Noticing Jamie had struck a sour note Ray quickly scolded the actor asking why would he be hitting the wrong key? After all, Ray told him, 'It's right there underneath your fingers, man.' Jamie took that lesson and made it one to focus on for a lifetime. Jamie asserts, 'Life is notes underneath our fingers. We just have to decide which ones to play to make our music.' The same lesson applies to each of us. It's finding the right keys to play our own unique melody that equals the secret to life—that's what Ray Charles was trying to tell him. Even a blind man had more clarity and insight into this world than most of us who can see.

Focus beyond giving—As in any crisis, the immediacy fades, the headlines change and eventually the story won't be on everyone's lips. Once the pictures of stranded people on rooftops, stiff bodies lying on the roadside, or babies without nourishment are no longer pulling at our heartstrings; once the fundraisers have ceased and the waters have receded, it doesn't mean all will be well. That is the beginning of a new phase. We can use this tragedy as a way to stay connected with more of what's going on in our government and our nation. Get active. Get involved. Expand the focus beyond the giving. Insist on getting to the bottom of an issue that affects you as a member of this democracy. Make your voice heard when it counts the most. Don't forget this is still a nation of WE THE PEOPLE. . . Focus on what you can do to keep it that way! When the next tragedy comes, and it will, perhaps we will all be better for having experienced this one.

A chance we've been given—There is something about human nature that needs adversity to get our full attention. We're adversity adrenaline junkies and the adversity itself serves to trigger that fight or flight response in all of us. Whatever the cause—whether it be a fatal disease, a plane crash or car wreck, a mindless rape or senseless murder, an enemy attack or a natural disaster—the calamity or catastrophe or misfortune might be different, but the feeling is the same. In the end, the bottom line is this—if you are still here, than there is hope. If you are still here, there is a way to make the world better today than yesterday and even better tomorrow than today. If you are still here, you can count for something. Katrina was a disaster with far-reaching ramifications. It is a storm that will impact lives in ways that have not yet been revealed. If you are still here you have been given a chance. Don't become complacent or indifferent or ineffectual or uncaring. Don't squander the occasion. There is a golden opportunity to focus on the bounty of riches this tragedy has produced. We don't have to look far. These riches are right there within our focus. They are found within the silver lining. If only we stop and look we will surely see them.

Pz is a writer and empowerment strategist. Her unique brand of self-help expertise focuses on relationships, fulfillment and the human condition.

Have an issue or topic on your mind? You can reach Pz at her address: pzpower@aol.com Visit her @www.pzpower.com and add your suggestions.

BODYBUILDING

MHP
MAXIMUM HUMAN PERFORMANCE

athlete of the month



Brian Whitacre

Height: 5'9"

Weight: Off-season: 190 Competition: 170

Hometown: Blacksburg, VA

Occupation: Post-doctoral applied economic research / teaching, Virginia Tech

Personal Accomplishments: Completing Ph.D. in applied economics while prepping for the 2005 season, and winning 3 natural pro cards (WNBF, WNSO, NGA) in the process.

Favorite Body Part: None. When I look at my own physique, I mostly see areas that need to be improved.

Favorite Exercises: Weighted pull-ups, squats

Favorite MHP Product: Probiotic SR Cookies 'N Cream. It provides my body with a continuous flow of amino acids over 12 hours which keeps me from going catabolic. Besides, I love the taste.

Training Beliefs: Train with intensity – give it all you've got every day. I aim for 5 – 10 reps while maintaining relatively strict form.

Getting Started: I was the weakest kid in my high school weight training class (including the girls). It took me over four years (lifting 6 days a week) to be able to bench press 135 pounds. I lifted weights for another five years after that before I discovered natural bodybuilding, and I was hooked!

Competing: In my opinion there are three things that make a successful bodybuilder:

- 1) Work ethic in the gym
- 2) Dedication to the diet
- 3) Humility

Best Advice to Offer: Learn what your body responds to, in terms of both working out and dieting.

Seek out the advice of successful competitors, but put some thought into your contest prep – don't just blindly follow the routines of others.

Contact Information: b_whitacre@yahoo.com

Welcome little Don Tennant Smith

Congrats to writer and photog husband and wife team, Gordon and Diane Smith on the arrival of Don, born on Tues., Aug 23 at 6:45 pm at 8 lbs 11 oz.

