Sandy Hope

November 2, 2012 By Oriol R. Gutierrez Jr.

When Hurricane Sandy came ashore on the New Jersey coast south of Atlantic City, my partner and I braced for the worst. Although we live more than a 100 miles north in a ground level apartment in Hoboken, much of our city is below sea level and prone to flooding.

Thankfully our apartment did not flood. However, our neighbors in ground level apartments starting just a block west from us and further west and south were not so lucky. Despite the discomfort of days without electricity, we're grateful that was all the storm did to us.

Here's a photo I took of a typical flooded apartment:

The damage to Hoboken is deep, but I acknowledge the devastation is widespread. I thought I knew how bad things were elsewhere by listening to dozens of hours of coverage on our small transistor radio, but nothing prepared me for what the photos and videos depicted.

A collective tragedy like a natural disaster can often force a personal tragedy like HIV to the background, at least until the communal crisis is over. And that's as it should be. Wonderful examples of this principle were the "charging stations" that popped up across the city.

Here's a photo I took of one of them:

Only a few pockets of the city still had electricity just after the storm. As cell phones everywhere started to lose power, generous people from those fortunate apartments shared their fortune.

I waited for hours to get my cell phone charged. It obviously was worth it to me since I needed the power, but the unexpected added value was the camaraderie of neighbors.

After I thanked one of the charging station owners, she said, "No need, any of us would have done the same thing."

I don't know that any of us would have, but many did. And that gives me hope.

People can come together when needed. People can be moved to action. I hope that we all remember these truths after the flood waters recede.

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