

Visions

Kelle Greene-Soltis

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“Visions,” by Kelle Greene-Soltis. ISBN 978-1-62137-679-8 (Softcover)
978-1-62137-645-3 (Hardcover).

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Dedication

*T*his book is dedicated to all of the Hurricane Ike victims, the islanders that lost their homes, and the poor souls that lost their lives. God bless Bolivar Island, Galveston and all of the surrounding counties affected by Ike.

My family saw firsthand the damage a devastating storm can do to homes, lives and communities. My family ran from Ike and came to College Station.

I followed them back several weeks later when the city of Galveston gave the go ahead to allow residents back on the island. The devastation was surreal. I remember most vividly the rancid smell of decay and death that filled the air. Death of wildlife, the brown desecrated lawns caused by the salt water tides engulfing the entire island. It was a sad and humbling day driving back on the island; such an assault to the senses. It was like driving into a third world country, with what used to be a vacation hot spot. Thank you Galveston and Bolivar residents for having the strength, drive and love of the coast to rebuild, and to once again make Galveston and Bolivar a vacation hot spot that everyone can be proud of.

Chapter 1

It's a beautiful summer day on Crystal Beach and Samantha Somers seems to have it all. She lives in a comfortable, "feels-like-you've-come-home" beach house that overlooks the Gulf coast on a barrier island across the way from Galveston Island, Texas. Her features don't resemble a typical island native; with dark auburn hair, blue eyes, ivory skin and her petite frame, she stands out among the other island natives. Sam loves to call Crystal Beach home. Graduating from Sam Houston State University with a degree in journalism, Samantha, nicknamed Sam, stumbled into a job opportunity writing children's books for West House. Her dad, the only family she has, lives in Galveston, just a short ferry ride from her. Tom "Skully" Somers retired a few years ago from the real estate business. Her mom, Gail, died a few years ago of ovarian cancer. Avoiding anything that could trigger the nightmare of her mother's death has been her primary goal for some time. Her dad, her dog Skipper, Crystal Beach, and her writing give her solace now.

Most of her days are spent lounging on her deck writing children's stories acceptable to West House. Growing up with "The Little Engine That Could" was

big. In this day and time, writing children's books isn't as easy as one might think. Kids have evolved. Everything is so technical now. Times have changed.

Long walks on the beach with Skipper, admiring the lighthouse that survived the 1900 storm, are priceless to her. The people that live here are family. Some live here year round, some vacation in the summer, but they all have one thing in common; they are all a part of Crystal Beach.

Remembering her mom takes over at times and the island's beauty transforms into memories of anger and loss. Her mom's last breath will forever burn like fire in her heart. The ache of never being able to hug her, laugh with her or share her life will always be a strangling void. Overcoming such extreme loss is difficult. The island's tranquility helps dull her pain.

Listening to the waves roll in, hitting land with a gentle "swish" and rolling back out again; repeating over and over again, brings solace. It's something you can rely on time and time again. Not many things offer that type of contentment. What peace there is in that. All you have to do is be to enjoy it.

Snapped back to reality, Sam realizes she has to focus on the here and now. A hurricane is headed toward her beloved barrier island and she will soon learn how abruptly one's life can be turned upside down.

Forever changed.

Chapter 1

“Dad, I think we need to take this seriously, this Hurricane Ike could be *it*. Hurricane Ike is something I think “we” should take seriously.” Sam irritably stated the obvious.

“Skully”, retired from the Marine reserves a few years ago, is still all marine. He built a very successful real estate business while being in the reserves, but once a Marine, always a Marine. His hair cut is still a typical Marine “buzz”. At 6 foot, he’s 200 pounds of solid muscle; and as hard headed as ever. His soft demeanor is in stark contrast to his solid frame.

“Sam, they’ve been saying ‘the big one is coming’ for years. We just need to sit tight and watch the weather.”

Skully and Sam evacuated for Hurricane Rita and what a disaster that turned out to be. The hurricane wasn’t a disaster for Galveston but the evacuation was a nightmare.

“We need to be prepared to evacuate. I don’t want a repeat of Rita. I’ll make reservations in College Station, at the Marriott. They take dogs and it’s on the evacuation route.” Sam remembered like it was yesterday evacuating for Rita. The drive to

College Station normally takes about three hours. Running from Rita took sixteen.

“Honey, go ahead and make the reservations, but I know the storm will turn. How about we eat lunch and try some fishing later?”

September 10, 2008.

Writing turned out to be quite a difficult task. You would think writing a twenty page book would be somewhat easy. It's not. You have to get your point across with few words and a whole lot of pictures *and* CNN showing the cone of impact for Hurricane Ike every 2 minutes wasn't helping.

Sitting on her deck, looking out at the water, the white sand, smelling the sea breeze and watching the birds was indescribable. She felt unease in her heart, but no sign of a raging storm had claimed the island's solace yet. Living anywhere else on Earth was unimaginable to her.



They decided on Rollover Pass to fish. You couldn't tell from watching the islanders that this paradise was in any threat of being destroyed in just a few short days.

After fishing and saying goodbye to Skully, Sam decided to go down to The Stingaree to eat and maybe indulge in a “Stingarita.” Hoping that a margarita and visiting with her island friends would help to improve her mood.

The Stingaree was buzzing with Hurricane Ike conversation. The islanders were becoming scared

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now. Galveston was calling for a complete evacuation. Sam knew that they would have to evacuate. Hurricane Ike made the decision for them.

September 11, 2008

“Skully, I’m taking the ferry over to Galveston. We really need to discuss evacuating.” Sam had called her father ‘Skully’ more often than ‘Dad’ since she was a little girl.

“Sure Sam, come on over, I’ve just started cooking breakfast.”

“Sounds good, I’m sure the ferry is swamped, so it could be an hour or so before I make it.”

“Okay honey, see you soon.”

Riding the ferry over to Galveston took just as long as expected; forever.

Pulling up at Skully’s beach house in Lafette’s Cove, Sam sat in her jeep admiring the house and his property. The house sits on 3 lots. The exquisite landscaping included palm trees, crepe myrtle, pompous grass, oak trees, bird of paradise, hibiscus, and Christmas cactus all surrounding a kidney shaped pool. The tallest rubber plant Sam had ever seen stood at least twenty-five feet tall, and is the staple of the landscaping. Landscape gazing did little to distract her, in fact, it made the situation even more difficult. She knew she’d have to talk her dad into leaving everything behind and it would break his heart.

“Hey dad, I finally made it.” He was busy cooking breakfast.

“I’ve cooked enough for an army. I hope you’re hungry.”

"I can always eat." She couldn't tell him that her stomach was so upset from worrying that the smell of food was nauseating. At some point he was going to have to face reality.

"Skully, have you watched CNN this morning?"

"Yes, I've been keeping an eye on the storm."

"Dad, it's not a damn storm it's a major category 4 hurricane headed straight for us!!"

"I think it will turn. Trust me, I've been living on this island for 53 years, seen my share of hurricanes. I know a little bit more about this than you do. Honestly, I think we should have a hurricane party!"

"I think we should evacuate!! Dad, the city is telling us to evacuate. Maybe that is something we should do *before* it hits. I love you, but my decision is final, we're leaving. You're retired. I can work from anywhere. I love my home just as much as you do but it's not worth dying for. We need to leave today. I'll help you pack, we'll take the ferry back over to Bolivar, I'll get my things and Skipper and we'll go through Winnie and pick up I-10."

"Since when did my daughter become so bossy? Fine, fine, I'll leave with you, but can we at least eat breakfast before we go?"