

BY CHUCK KRALLMAN

A true story.

THE IRMA DIARIES

*One man's honest, funny and shocking account
of life after a category 5 hurricane tore
through the British Virgin Islands in 2017*



LITTLE
MOUNTAIN
PUBLISHING

Little Mountain. Beef Island, BVI. 2017

After hurricane Irma, BVI resident Chuck Krallman posted a daily commentary on his Facebook page. It went viral.

His brilliant observations about the smallest detail of daily life in post-apocalyptic Tortola, mixed with some very dry humour and bowls of Quaker Oats, makes for gripping reading. We asked him if we could curate them, in chronological order, for people to re-read.



Here is a map so you can get your bearings:



Chuck's House

5th September 2017 – the day before

12.38pm

Thanks to all my friends who have messaged me regarding Hurricane Irma. If you've been following the storm, you know it's now a catastrophic Category 5 hurricane with 180mph sustained winds and headed straight for Tortola.

Unfortunately, my flights were cancelled and I'm stuck in the BVI, preparing to ride things out. I will most likely lose power and Internet tonight, so I may be out of touch for a few days. If you've visited me, you know my house is built like a bunker, so a few people will be coming over tonight for safe shelter. It's going to be messy and there's certain to be a lot of property damage, but everyone will be OK. Again, thanks for your well wishes. Prayers for all of my friends who are in its path in the Caribbean and Florida. Be safe and please don't take any chances!

6th September – the day itself

NO POST FROM CHUCK.

THE EYE OF CAT 5 HURRICANE IRMA WENT STRAIGHT THROUGH THE MIDDLE OF THE BRITISH VIRGIN ISLANDS AROUND LUNCHTIME. ALL POWER AND COMMUNICATIONS WENT DOWN.

7th September – the day after

5pm (30 hours after the eye of the hurricane)

To all my friends, I wanted to let you know that I'm OK. All the other people and pets that were staying with me are also good. The BVI has been absolutely devastated. There's no power, phones, Internet or water. My house structurally withstood Irma with no problem, but several shutters got stripped off, which then sucked the doors and most of the contents of the affected rooms right out.

Fortunately, my damage is mostly restricted to the contents of three rooms. My neighbors weren't so lucky. The roof pulled off of the homes of my neighbors on my left and my right and the entire home of my neighbor across the street is now in my driveway. It got cleaned to the slab.

The roads are impassable. From what I can see, virtually all homes here are either completely destroyed or severely damaged, mostly missing roofs. All the boats that were securely moored for the storm have either sunk or have wrecked into the shore.

Virtually every tree in the BVI has broken in half, along with nearly all of the power poles being down. I suspect it will be weeks or months until power is restored because so many new poles must be set. I will try to button up the house as best I can then return to the States, but it will be a while.

If you're in the path of this storm, I cannot emphasize enough how dangerous it is. I have been through multiple hurricanes in my life, including being in the eye of a Cat 4, but nothing even remotely compares to this. We were in the eye of Irma for more than an hour and the winds near the eye were sustained at 185mph+, at least one hour before and one hour after the eye. Gusts were over 200mph. Winds were 100-120mph for at least 6 hours and waves reached 40 feet. It's a monster. If you're in its path, please get out now.

8th September

9am

Hi everyone – I have only two minutes of rationed generator left at a neighbor's house. Hurricane Jose is scheduled to hit the BVI as a Category 4 storm on Saturday night. We're preparing as best we can.

4.05pm

Hello, all. Here's the latest from Tortola. I'm fine and all the people and pets I'm sheltering at my house are doing well. We're desperately trying to batten down the house before Hurricane Jose strikes tomorrow night. It's difficult without power and supplies. We're scavenging sheets of plywood that have been strewn around to cover windows and doors that were blown out by Irma.

In my last update, I mentioned that nearly all homes have been severely damaged or destroyed and that 95% of all boats are wrecked. In addition, I've learned that

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nearly all cars have been destroyed, as well, and many have been piled up in big heaps by the wind. My trusty Land Cruiser lives, undamaged.

I understand all the prisoners are now free and there has been some looting in town, which is not good, obviously. The roads to my house are impassable, so that actually provides me a great deal of security – and there are several of us (and four dogs, which don't all get along, by the way) staying at my house so I'm not concerned about my security.

Some military ships are on their way. Assistance can't get here soon enough. A couple of emergency flights landed today, but I've heard our ports were destroyed.

It's going to be a long slog to bring the BVI back to life, but I'm doing well. Please don't worry about me. To all my friends in the path of Irma, please be safe!

I'm going to attempt to load some pictures if I can.

That's my neighbor's house in my driveway. Most cars were totally destroyed. In town, they are piled into heaps. So much for the lush landscaping...





9th September

Here's the latest from the BVI... The people and dogs are still OK at my place and lots of loved ones have been able to reconnect recently.

There's a lot of concern now about all the prisoners that are free, some of whom were serving life sentences. The island is under martial law and there's a curfew in effect. I assume some military vehicles were brought in by helicopter yesterday because we saw patrols on the hills continuously after dark. I understand more military and other aid missions will be arriving today with food and supplies.

Hurricane Jose is supposed to be up to 140mph when it passes to the North of the BVI tonight. It will be a serious storm for us, but nothing like what we just went through. We're not expecting a dead-on hit like we got with Irma, but we're working frantically to batten-down things that have been weakened and preserve what we do have.

Some people, including one of the people staying with me, have been able to get off the island by charter plane. The airport is heavily damaged, the hangers have collapsed and the airport fire station has been swept away. I can't imagine that commercial flights will be possible until there are fire vehicles ready.

I'll say this, you see the true nature of people when they have to go through something like this. Fortunately, most people are truly giving, sharing, and taking care of their neighbors.

At my place, we should be fine tonight and my thoughts and prayers go out to all my friends in Irma's path. The destructive power is immense. When you board up, make sure you don't have even the tiniest gap between the plywood and the wall or the ply will be peeled off by the wind and you'll then lose the window or door, followed by everything in the room. Don't be brave. Many, many people have lost their lives – at least 20 on Tortola, I'm told. When things are more normal, I'll share some of the harrowing escape stories from the people I've reconnected with who had near-death experiences. Nearly everyone I know here has lost everything. Please learn from my experience and take shelter. Be safe everyone.

10th September

There's a lot of good news to report this morning. First and foremost, Hurricane Jose turned north and completely missed us. Thank God. It was packing 150mph winds and it would have obliterated what's left of the BVI in its current state.

Second, and almost as important, the Cavalry has arrived in the form of British troops. After the initial helicopter drops of military equipment and crews on Friday, at least three fully load C-130 military aircraft began bringing troops to the airport yesterday. They're set up camp at the airport, have secured the Beef Island bridge, by my house, and are deploying around the island. There is marshal law in effect and nightly curfews. Military and police are patrolling the roads at night with searchlights. The looting has stopped and order is being restored. The prisoners are still loose and I'm not sure what the plan is to deal with that, but security is tight now. The soldiers all have automatic weapons and they're not messing around.

We have a brand-new Governor here, as of a few weeks ago. Talk about baptism by fire! He's doing an amazing job, doing all the right things in the right order in a very short period of time. Behind the military will come several hundred police officers from other British islands, like Cayman and Bermuda. Two hundred British engineers are on their way, to start patching up the infrastructure, like getting power, water, and communications restored. Everything has been knocked out – and in a catastrophic way – so even the most essential services will most likely take weeks to get running. Outlying areas could take months because virtually power poles have snapped. I'm not sure of the priority of my neighborhood. I really appreciate being a British territory at times like this because not only is massive relief coming, it's coordinated. God save the Queen!

The advantage of having multiple billionaires with places in the BVI is that many are activating major relief efforts. Richard Branson, who was staying in his wine cellar during the storm, is arranging relief efforts through Virgin. Larry Page, the founder of Google, who also owns an island here, is also putting together a relief effort. The multinational companies in the BVI have been arranging charters to evacuate their employees to other offices around the world.

The Administrative complex is destroyed so government won't be functioning anytime soon. Fortunately, the largest grocery stores are open. I understand there are long lines, with people being let in in small groups to get essentials. All banks have been destroyed so these stores are allowing people to just sign a ledger, promising to pay later. Some business owners are being overwhelmingly generous. For example, the fellow who owns one of the local car dealerships is letting people just borrow the cars he has on his lot to do essential tasks.

A couple people walked Apart from a few people, the vast majority of BVI islanders are pulling together and helping each other out. A couple of my local friends have walked miles to my house to check on me. It's heartwarming.

Because of the situation with all the dogs temporarily at my house (it feels like I'm running a kennel), as well as the people staying with me, I have not been able to venture far from my property. The road to my place is still impassable with fallen trees, home debris, and tangles of overhead wires. All the people who are staying with me, however, have been able to walk around the neighborhood to check on

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others and some have ventured into East End, a couple miles from my house, or gotten rides all the way to West End, on the other side of the island. They've come back with stories of devastation – especially in Road Town, the capitol. With so many people losing EVERYTHING, Road Town has been described as a scene out of a Zombie Apocalypse movie, with people just aimlessly walking around, not knowing what to do next.

Several ships are just offshore, with supplies. I'm not sure whether they're being held off because of security concerns yesterday or whether they're unable to dock. I expect massive amounts of aid to begin flowing in as soon as the ports are clear. I understand shipping containers are strewn about the port area, but now that reinforcements have arrived, that shouldn't be too big of an impediment.

As I type this, I haven't heard from all my friends in Florida. My prayers go out to them for their safety.

11th September

Chuck posted videos of his neighbours house

9.04am

First, I'd like to apologize for my grammar mistakes in yesterday's update. My normal proofreader had the day off. I would characterize yesterday as a day of continued stabilization. Some flights went in and out, evacuating women and children and a few people who chartered jets. Sadly, there was local BVI government red tape that prevented more flights from coming in. Today, I have heard that the military will play a bigger role in air traffic control and the floodgates will open and planes will be in and out every few minutes throughout the day, but so far this morning, I haven't seen increased air traffic. Lots more soldiers are supposed to arrive today, which will mean the troops won't be stretched so thinly. I'll feel a lot better with more troops on the ground because all the prisoners are still roaming free. The military presence has stopped the looting, but it will be good when military and police reinforcements arrive. I'd say the main problem now is the military can't tell the good guys from the bad guys and the bad guys are managing to get into damaged homes, pick through drawers and cabinets

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and take valuables. St. Thomas is apparently in the same shape we're in, but at least we have a functional airport now – they don't. I've just heard that some crews will leave here for St. Thomas today to help get flights going there, which may be as early as sometime today. I haven't really been able to follow the news closely, but I understand Barbuda, an island to our East has been destroyed to the point of being uninhabitable. If that's a 0 on a scale of 10, then the BVI is probably a 2. Someone told me this morning that at least partial service has been restored at one of the three cell companies. I'm still not getting signal on my phone, but when cell service is back, that will be an enormous step forward. Right now, there's no way for anyone to communicate since all the land lines are down, as well as no cellular service. When people are trying to find each other, they must walk and then search, which can take hours. From what I've heard from those who've managed to drive around, there are a handful of large structures intact and with generator power, but it's probably fewer than 10. Our brand new – and very large – hospital is fully functional and intact. Including the homes, I'm guessing 1% of the housing inventory is mostly undamaged and with generator power. I'm a step down from that since I don't have power, phone or water, but I have a roof and all my walls. My generator is broken or I would be golden, relatively speaking, of course. My pool is slowly leaking water, but is still half full. It's full of tree branches and dirt, but at least it's H₂O. We've been using that water to get the worst dirt off our dishes before we use clean water for the final step. We're trying to ration our water since my house is supporting several people and dogs. Cold showers are a rare prize and I've managed to get one since last Tuesday. It's sweltering hot now and there's no breeze, but I'll take that to storms and rain! With damp furniture, four dogs, and several unshowered people, things are a little “ripe.” Today, I'm going to use a crowbar to pry the stuck cover off my cistern, which has 30,000 gallons of clean water in it. We'll lower a bucket so we'll be able to wash our dishes and start to clean up. That's the plan at least. I expect today will be a big day at my house, as we transition people and dogs in and out. Hopefully, my dog sitting days are numbered. We have two warring factions of two pairs of dogs and World War III erupts every time the dogs need to be walked. One of my guests should be able to get off the island today, but others may be moving into my house from other temporary shelter. As the Black Knight said in the Monty Python movie, “It's only a flesh wound. I've had worse.”

12th September

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Yesterday was a good day in Paradise. In our last episode of Chuck's world, you may recall the quest for water. I'm happy to report success! I was able to pry the stuck cover off the cistern and access 30,000 gallons. There are some leaves on the top, but it's pure rain water and suitable for washing things. It's drinkable after boiling. I washed the accumulated dishes and started to clean up the kitchen and main areas. Little by little, at least some organization is returning.

The owner of one set of dogs returned yesterday and took them to his house, which now leaves two dogs that get along. Peace and quiet has been restored to the household, as well.

Yesterday was a day of transition, with one of my guests departing on an evac flight, but another homeless person arriving to spend the night before moving to more permanent quarters. I suspect this short-term musical chairs pattern will continue for a few days, as people find ways off the island, freeing some other places of shelter. Most of us are expecting it to take a few months before power is restored everywhere on the island because almost all the poles have snapped off. Certainly, some places will get power back faster, but even the highest priority areas will probably take many weeks.

The airport was much more active yesterday, with aid flights coming in and evac flights going out. I live on Beef Island, which is connected to Tortola by bridge. The main airport in the BVI is on Beef Island, right around the corner from my house, so I live in a very strategic spot. Lots more troops have arrived and the bridge to Beef Island now military guards most of the day so I'm finally feeling very secure. My house doesn't overlook the airport, but homes a short distance around my street do, and one of them is now, or will be soon, housing eight soldiers. I still don't know what the plan is for rounding up the prisoners, but with more and more security, the sense of danger has mostly passed – at least for me and those at my house. We're still under martial law with a 6:00pm curfew, and I expect that to continue for some time. At night, except for the airport and the light from a handful of places with generators, the island is completely pitch black and silent at night. It's very eerie.

During the day, it's interesting to see what's happened to the wildlife. With all the bushes and trees gone, some birds are becoming much more aggressive, in search of food. Rats are more prevalent, as well as ants everywhere. One of my guests was driving in the mountains yesterday and saw an Emu running free. Now that's weird. I have a few Crown of Thorns plants that survived and they're attracting scores of hummingbirds. And the flamingos have returned to the salt pond! All my coconut and other species of palms at my house got flattened, except my three hurricane palms. Huh. I wonder how they got their name?

There's an enormous, and increasing garbage problem. I still haven't been able to get out of my driveway to get to Road Town, but I'm told the air is a bit, how shall I say, pungent? I see a few random fires on the hills, as people try to burn the accumulated waste and debris.

There are two pillars to the BVI economy, tourism and financial services, with more than half a million corporations headquartered here. Annual corporate fees represent the main source of revenue to the government, as well as providing revenue to the many law firms and trust companies. While tourism will be in a shamble for a long time, the financial services sector may start to breathe life as early as next week, which would be great news. There will be billions of dollars needed to clean up this mess. I'm wondering where it will all come from...

It's clear the BVI will not be able to sustain the number of people who are here now for quite some time. There's inadequate shelter for the homeless and thousands of people need to leave as soon as possible to put less stress on the fragile infrastructure – at least until power and basic services are restored. I've been offered help by many people who want to come down and lend a hand, but now's not the time. No one should be coming to the BVI right now unless they're part of an aid delegation.

My communications window every day is small, so I need to keep these updates brief. Please don't try to text me, as it's very difficult to respond. Email is probably OK, but I'm trying to update as many of my friends as possible using Facebook. It's the most efficient means right now. Still doesn't mean I like Zuckerberg.

For those of you who were wondering about the state of our charter boat industry, here's a shot of the boats that were moved to a safe place and secured before the storm...



13th September

9.17am

The Willy-T has been lost.

I'm inserting a dramatic pause here to let the gravity of that statement sink in.



Now, on to today's update, which is a landmark one because this is the one-week anniversary of Irma's little gift to the BVI. Last Wednesday at this time, the winds were just starting to kick up. By 9:00am, we had tropical force winds and we were still outside, on ladders, with battery-powered drills, in a last-ditch effort to shore up any potential weak spots as the wind increased. By 9:30am, those efforts were no longer possible and we all retreated inside. By 10:00am, we had hurricane force winds. By 11:30am, winds were up to 185mph and they sustained at that intensity, with gusts to 225mph. Water started flowing strongly under the doors and through electrical fixtures in the concrete. At that point, we didn't know what was going to happen next and if we would have to move from our safe room. As bad as it was, we didn't know if it could get even worse. At 12:40pm, we entered the eye. We cleared shutters and debris from our door and got to an inner hallway in the house to peer outside. From there, we saw 40' waves crashing to the shore below. To my South, up Little Mountain hill, the old Governor's mansion was in reasonable shape, but had lost part of its roof. At about 1:40pm, the storm resumed, but this

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time the winds were from the opposite direction. By 4:30pm, things had calmed down to the point we could walk around and try to find other survivors. I looked up the hill and the Governor's mansion was toast. All the homes I could see were destroyed or heavily damaged. It's hard to believe a week has already passed.

Since then, I've tried to post every day at a neighbor's house on the other side of Little Mountain hill in my neighborhood. He has a generator and, somehow, kept a wired Internet connection through the storm even though all the poles are down (???). To ration diesel, he turns on the generator only a few hours per day and the Internet is very slow, but it's been reliable. To get there, I must walk over the hill through downed trees and telephone poles and a tangle of electrical and phone wires. The road is still not clear to my house and driveway. It's a difficult journey through the brush, even though it's no more than a quarter mile.

I've seen it reported that 4K people in the BVI are still missing. I suspect the vast majority of these people are OK, but without reliable communications, it's really hard to find people. Lack of good communications remains a huge issue. Cell service is being restored slowly and methodically, but hasn't gotten to me yet. I understand a contingent will be arriving today with Sat phones that can provide WiFi. That will be great, if it works. Other people who have Sat phones have had inconsistent links. While aid is arriving, there has been no coordinated communication yet to let people know where to go. Some people are even running out of water and don't know the location of aid.

The big episodes of looting ended when the first troops arrived and things came quickly under control, but I wish I could say the properties are now all safe. The prisoners are all still free and some people are still going into abandoned homes and rifling through things. Even as more and more police arrive from other British territories to help out, it will be difficult to stop crime completely for a while. We continue to have a nightly curfew and I'm hoping that stays in place for a few weeks.

Besides the communication issue, getting people off this island is a huge priority. Thousands of people need to leave as soon as possible because the infrastructure can't support them. Only aid flights are coming and going and there are masses of

people waiting for flights and boats. Lots of people are desperate to get out, by any means possible.

Thinking one step ahead, we'll need thousands of tradesmen to enter the territory to rebuild. We'll also need thousands of staff for the rebuilt businesses, as they reopen, to replace the people who leave and don't come back. I'm praying the Government will streamline Immigration and Labor procedures to not let bureaucracy choke off our recovery.

My neighbor, who provides me this essential communication lifeline, is a smart international businessman who has seen the world. He is not one to exaggerate. He managed to get to Road Town yesterday and it was a sobering experience for him. He described the town as like a scene from war torn Syria. I would agree with that assessment. If you're only seeing the pictures, you simply can't imagine what it's like here. In the States, when a disaster strikes Texas or Florida, there are highways. After the waters recede or the roads are cleared, crews can pour in from neighboring States and people can flow out. Here, it's a tiny island. Multiply the logistical difficulties by least 100X.

On a positive note, everyone has lost a lot of weight, they're looking much trimmer, and they're getting in their 10,000 steps of daily activity. Oh, and I won't be getting any big electricity bills for a while. So I've got that going for me, which is nice.

If any of my Facebook friends have Hollywood connections, I think this would be a great location for next season's "Naked and Afraid" or "Survivor: Tortola"

4.41pm

The big news in the BVI is that the fence is back up and the prison has been secured. There's a large military presence there and prisoners are either returning voluntarily or being captured. A notice was put out that prisoners had 24 hours to return on their own. I understand that guns and other weapons are being found in the cars and places of shelter of the ones that have been captured. With a secure prison and all the military transport flights that have come in over the past few

days, there are enough soldiers here now to capture and guard the bad guys and effectively enforce the curfew everywhere. This is a HUGE step forward.

Again, while I've got a lot of my own problems to deal with, it appears the Command and Control system is working. If the BVI were an independent nation and we didn't have the British to coordinate everything, we would be in much, much worse shape.

I got a message yesterday that my cell company has restored some service in town, has overseas crews on-island to help, and will be working outwards from there. I'm hopeful I'll be getting some cell service restored at my location within the next few days. On the communications link I've been using to send my reports, the Internet has slowed to a crawl in the last day as more people are able to access it. This morning, it was almost impossible to post on Facebook and I couldn't upload any pictures before the generator was shut down. Next to getting the island secure, getting reliable communications up is the next most important priority.

Garbage disposal services have also started to resume and many accessible dumpsters have been emptied. This is also huge news to control the rat problem. Water has been turned on in some areas, but this has exposed many broken pipes and water is shooting into the air in places. I have city water as a back-up to my cisterns, but it's not on yet at my house. When that comes back, it will also be an enormous step forward, because I will be able to flush toilets and clean throughout the livable areas, without having to lug buckets from my cistern. The net-net is that the pace of progress is increasing and I'm "hoping" the big steps forward continue.

When we gather at the end of the day, we all share news of what we've seen and learned during the day. I try to post the best information I have from the most reliable sources. I try to verify stories whenever possible. One quickly learns who has the facts and who exaggerates or just spreads gossip.#FakeNews.

14th September

8.30am

My morning update will be very short today. There's been the loss of a long-time family pet a couple of minutes ago at my neighbor's house. This occurred at the place where I get my Internet access. It was an old dog and the stress was just too much, I suppose. I want to give the family some space.

I understand power has now been restored to some buildings in town that get their electricity through underground cables. The main commercial port is now open and another UK Navy ship is on its way. Water has even been restored to some areas. Along with the prison now secured, these are huge developments.

I still don't have power, running water, land-line, Internet or cell communications at my house – and my road is blocked and I can't get out of my driveway to get supplies. Everything has to be hand-carried through a tangle of trees, fallen power poles and down slippery hills to get to my place. One of the guys who lost everything and stayed with me during the storm, left a couple days ago and took my machete so I don't even have the tools to clear things myself. That's annoying because everyone knows how handy I am with a machete..

Someone forwarded me an article yesterday that the BVI isn't eligible for aid through a GBP1.3B international fund because our country isn't poor enough. This is criminal. I've said this before, but what people don't realize, is that when a disaster happens in the US or UK or Germany, or any other developed country, an area of the country is affected, but not the entire country. People and supplies can move in and out of that area. People can stay with family members in other States and crews can be mobilized to move in. Here, it's a tiny island and there's no place to go. 100% of the country has been devastated. The logistics of moving supplies and aid is extraordinarily difficult and expensive. Thousands of people are living in ramshackle buildings with no walls and need to leave. Many people have lost everything, have no cash or clothes, and don't have the money to leave. The BVI isn't in the news cycle anymore, as the world focuses on the news of the day and Florida. I pray that international funds can be tapped and the British government doesn't turn off the flow because of budget considerations.

5.15pm

And then the rains came.

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Since Irma passed, we've been blessed with sunny weather. Until today. We've had occasional showers, which mixes with the leaves and mud to create very slippery conditions. As of yesterday, I heard the hospital needed more doctors and medical personnel to chip in, so hopefully accidents can be kept to a minimum while the infrastructure is so stressed. Besides all the other problems, it's very easy to slip and fall, or be cut by roofing material, or step on a nail in a board during clean-up efforts.

The good news for today is that people are starting to clean up the massive mess around their homes. They're picking up debris and sweeping up glass shards from broken windows. We're still short of basic things necessary for this effort like machetes and hand saws to clear the brush away from doors and paths. I know this disaster has made me much more resourceful. I've discovered that combining Two Parts Hydrogen + One Part Oxygen = Delicious and Refreshing Homemade Water that would make Martha Stewart proud.

I reported earlier that the port was operating. The main supermarkets have now been restocked with large supplies of food. More areas are getting power restored as poles go up and new wires are strung. The mood of the island is now far less "panicky" than it was just yesterday.

Lots and lots of people are leaving the islands now. I heard, but cannot confirm yet, that one of the cruise lines will be sending a ship to evacuate people to Puerto Rico. That would solve several major problems in one fell swoop.

Communications are still severely challenged, but two cell carriers have managed to get service restored in Road Town. Road Town is in the middle of the island, and crews continue to work out from there. The WiFi node I've been using since Irma struck is now so slow it's almost unusable. This morning, it took 10 minutes to load the Facebook page and another 10-20 minutes to post my report. If it deteriorates any further, I may not be able to post again for a while.

As for my situation, I was finally able to get to some buildings on my property that had been blocked by trees. I've now done an initial assessment of all the damage to my place, room by room. I'm working on a spreadsheet of

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everything that needs to be done. So far, I've noted more than 100 things that need to be repaired or replaced; some large and some small. Until I can get power, either through securing a portable generator or getting the mains back, I'm pretty much dead in the water. So I remain without power, water, phone, and Internet. I also desperately need a chain saw to be able to get out of my driveway. Some friends cleared a path on my road today, so if I can get my driveway open, I'm golden.

There's a lot of stuff to do and it will be a challenge for me to get replacement items here – and to find the necessary skills to put everything right – but I am so, so lucky to not have major, structural damage. People look at their heavily damaged homes, usually missing roofs, and say, out loud, “Oh my God. Where do I even begin?”

I'm still astonished by what the wind could lift and carry. You've probably seen pictures of cars that were overturned or piled in heaps or 50' catamarans that flew through the air. At my place, large chunks of the house belonging to the neighbor to my South flew completely over my house and ended up on the shore on the North side of my house. A 10 pound stone – a granite stone that's completely round, mind you – got picked up on the South side of my house, and either was lifted over my house, which is 30' tall, or somehow made its way through my house when some windows blew out. I found it in my pool, on the North side. I live 120' above sea level and found a conch shell in my kitchen. How is this stuff even possible??? People have recovered my Nespresso capsules 500 feet away, on the other side of a hill. No sign of George Clooney. I've searched my entire property, and each of my neighbors' places, and I still have no idea what happened to my full-size sofa.

Oh, yes. And how could I forget the mosquitoes? They're swarming and they're the size of lawn tractors. Mosquitoes, roaches and rats. We've got 'em all. We've won the trifecta, baby! But seriously, the mosquito population exploded today and they're very aggressive. We're going to have an outbreak of diseases carried by mosquitoes unless something can be done quickly. There's standing water everywhere. Sadly, I think this problem is only going to get worse.

15th September

8.33am

It rained most of last night, with scattered thunder and lightning. And the mosquito population has simply exploded. When I walked the dogs this morning, within a minute, my legs were covered by mosquitoes, despite me spraying with Deep Woods Off, containing 25% DEET. Once outside, the dogs' faces were instantly covered with them. There's simply nowhere to hide. Shaking one's arm or leg isn't enough to make them fly away. They bite the moment they land and they stay attached until they are swatted. They're so dense, one slap can kill several at a time. It's unreal.

Last night, I was thinking of all the people who had lost their roofs or had their walls blown out. We're still under curfew, starting at 6:00pm, so there are no headlights, streetlights, or lights in windows. People would have been huddled in a corner in their pitch-black homes, getting soaked with rain, and they would have been covered by mosquitoes. While I have reported a lot of progress in the past few days, the rains and mosquitoes have taken living conditions a step backwards again. Most people in the BVI were in misery last night.

Today is September 15th, which marks the approximate half-way point of the 2017 hurricane season. There will be lots more rain and it looks like more storms are brewing in the Atlantic. It's too early to say whether they'll strike us.

It was reported in the UK that 90 of 100 prisoners were now in custody. That's incorrect and misleading. One would get the impression from that statistic that we could check that problem off our list. Well, first, there were 130 prisoners in our jail, so that means 40 are still roaming free. Second, the clear majority of those now being held would have returned voluntarily, during the amnesty period. Don't get me wrong, I feel much safer now than I did two days ago, but that's due to the curfew and increased military presence. The worst of the worst are most likely still out there and there's still a lot of work to do to round them up.

All the people I provided shelter to during and after the storm have now moved on, either to better temporary conditions or they've left the island. I am still sheltering two dogs, neither of whom I knew prior to this storm. Neither of the dogs is very smart, but at least both believe Climate Change is real. Just sayin'.

OK, I need to fix some breakfast. Shall I have the oatmeal or the oatmeal this morning? It's hard to decide. I think I'll go with the oatmeal today to change things up.

2.13pm

I sprayed a layer of Deep Woods Off mosquito repellent on myself so thick it was like a slathered-on gel. I don't know whether this is a condemnation of Off as a repellent or a testament to the will of the mosquitoes, but they still attack. But now, their wings get stuck in the gel and they become easy targets.

4.02

Normally, I post once per day, but the generator is still running so here's a further update...

We had torrential rains just before noon that flooded the island and is causing more misery. Disease is a real possibility now. I'm going to post some pics...

4.04pm These are pics of the flash flood that occurred about four hours ago.





16th September

8.55am

Today marks Day Ten after Irma and it's sort of the best of times and the worst of times. There are 500 British troops on-island. I believe police contingents from other British overseas territories are now here, as well. Yesterday, I was told that 110 of the 130 prisoners were in custody and the remainder were expected to be swept up within 24-48 hours. If that can be accomplished, the whole island will be able to breathe a huge sigh of relief.

I didn't post what I'm about to tell you now because I didn't want to worry my friends, but seeing that things are reasonably secure, I can tell this story...

Immediately after Irma, there was general lawlessness. There was looting and lots of people were walking the streets with machetes. I'm only a couple miles from the prison, but my road was impassable, with downed trees, tangled wires, and dangerous debris. There was no curfew but, in my house, we were feeling reasonably secure. That first night, we were all sitting outside. The moon was full and we were watching shooting stars, with the sounds of ocean waves gently lapping below us. If there had not been a devastating hurricane only hours before, we all would have been enjoying a beautiful, Caribbean night.

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In the darkness, one of my guests thought she saw a flicker of light in a room of the mostly demolished house next door. It's about 150' away, normally hidden by trees, but there are no trees standing to block the view now, so we could clearly see every room. We went silent and watched intently to see whether the light was just a reflection. We saw the glow again. It was very faint; probably the light from a cell phone. We had heard that groups of prisoners had escaped, were armed, and were traveling together. We watched for a while. There were people in that house. I went to the kitchen to get kitchen knives and armed everyone. Henkels knives, by the way. They're excellent. But I digress...

We shined all flashlights on every opening in the house. We were loud and made the dogs bark. One other guy and I took our knives and our most powerful flashlights and went to my driveway to see if anyone was approaching. The drive and the road were clear of people. We slide-bolted shut our main entrance doors behind us and then barricaded broken shutters and furniture against the other door opening that wasn't secure. If someone tried to come in during the night, we'd hear them. The lights next door didn't come on again. We went to bed, with multiple people and dogs in each room. Everyone kept knives within easy reach. It was a tense night.

The next morning, the person who had been house-sitting next door discovered the lock had been picked and people had stayed there. They had rifled through things, but didn't take anything. They were there for shelter. With the road to my house being impassable, I thought we were more secure. But the criminals were looking for a remote hideout, where the military and police couldn't easily find them. The next day, the soldiers started arriving by transport plane and, little by little, order was restored. When the last of the prisoners is behind bars, it will be a happy day.

The Premier began touring the Territory yesterday, holding the first of many meetings with business owners in each of the Districts. He outlined plans, reported progress, and answered questions. The biggest grocery stores are now open during limited hours, with a good supply of food. The banks are also open a few hours per day and many have suspended loan repayment requirements. A few gas stations are open and I understand four restaurants are now at least partially operating across the island. Relief supplies are coming in, slowly but surely.

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The BVI Government Immigration and Labor departments are now operating, I'm told with expedited processing to not slow down recovery efforts. Many people are evacuating to San Juan, but the US is not accepting anyone unless they have US or Canadian passports or ESTA clearance. I'm not sure how the thousands of people here from the "down islands" will be getting home, as there are no commercial flights or ferry services to those places yet – and many have lost everything and don't have any money.

Yesterday, the skies opened for a couple of hours and a flash flood devastated the fragile recovery efforts. Torrents of water streamed down the mountain roads, carrying road sections and house debris. One of my friends was driving on the mountain road when the rains started, attempting to get to town. Her car nearly got swept away. Her journey was terrifying. Road Town got swamped with water and levels started to rise inside buildings. Cars stalled in the streets. With the mosquitoes swarming and now flood waters carrying dead animals, disease is a real risk. While, in many ways, recovery is happening even faster than I expected, an incident like this puts us back a few steps again.

As for me, I remain without power, running water, Internet, land line and cell communications. I'm able, twice per day, to get this Internet link at a neighbor's place.

But after the downpour yesterday, the sun is shining this morning. On my walk (climb?) from my house to the place, I noticed the first buds of green growth. The BVI will be back, better than ever.

For those of you who've been following my daily reports, I'm sure you're wondering what I had for breakfast this morning. I chose the oatmeal.

9.40am

This was just posted in the Daily Mail in the UK. There are many inaccuracies, but it ain't that far off:

6pm

The new disturbance now has the name Maria and is a Tropical Storm. If it follows the path that NOAA is predicting it will pass 50 miles south of Road Town as a major Hurricane with max sustained winds of 120 mph and gusts to 150 mph. No one needs more suffering down there that's for sure!

17th September

It now appears we will be struck by Hurricane Maria on Wednesday. It is strengthening quickly. Needless to say, if we take a direct hit, it will be very, very bad.

Last night, we had a strong thunderstorm with a period of heavy rain. The thunder and lightning kept me awake, but at least I was protected and dry. There are thousands of people who don't have adequate shelter. The rains, combined with the inescapable mosquitoes, would have made last night misery once again. Even people who are reasonably well off and have generators shut them off at night to conserve diesel. It's hot, with no breeze, and no one has slept well for the past 11 days.

Some of the Expat managers and small business owners, shell-shocked by the whole experience, and having lost most of their things, have simply gone. Sometimes, they catch the first available evacuation flight or ferry and leave behind their pets, cars and remaining belongings. Often, they don't leave any instructions, or even notice, to staff. Files and wet checkbooks are abandoned and others must now try to piece things together. One 60-year-old small business owner who's had a successful business here for almost 20 years, lost everything and decided he's too old to start over. He's packing what he has left and returning to the States. He won't be back.

A neighbor stopped by yesterday and we were talking about how this experience has not only exposed people's true characters, but also their ability to cope with high stress levels. Of those staying with me after the storm, a mature, 40-something manager of a marina, responsible for the property and 24 large boats, immediately abandoned everyone and everything. He somehow managed to get on one of the

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first evacuation flights with pregnant women and children. At the other end of the spectrum, a 22 year-old young lady, in her first job after University, was the strongest and most responsible.

Without exception, those I've spoken with have told me how this experience has permanently changed their lives. It's given everyone a chance to re-set their direction and priorities. The people who were born here are a resilient lot and are mostly working tirelessly. It'll be interesting to see how many of the Expats return to the BVI and rebuild.

I believe I reported that the last two dogs I was caring for were gone. I spoke too soon. They're back. But I did experience more than two hours yesterday of blissful peace and quiet. For the past few days, the dogs were being kept in my living room, which was one of my few rooms left completely intact and undamaged. My nice carpet is now a patchwork of dog poop. Imagine a Jackson Pollack in mostly brown shades. I guess I was growing tired of that carpet, anyway.

We are still lacking basic supplies like tarps, generators, and chainsaws, but I understand those things are on a large ship heading this way. Plywood is scarce but, again, I understand a load of ply is on a barge, now on its way from Florida. In fact, lots and lots of stuff should be somewhere in the pipeline, but is not here yet. Fuel is flowing and there's food in the main stores, but that's about it. People are cleaning up, but we really need tools, materials, and power from portable generators to make substantial progress. There's only so much that can be done with machetes and hammers.

The mosquitoes continue to be a major, major problem. If there was ever a time for mosquito fogging, it's now. I understand my daily posts are widely read. If anyone has a way to get the island fogged by airplane or helicopter, that would be an enormous help. Having said that, there are disaster specialists from the UK on the ground, so I'm sure they're on it.

My oatmeal was especially delicious this morning, by the way.

18th September

7.45 am

Well, I wish I had better news this morning, but it now seems certain we will be blasted by Maria. It's projected to be a major hurricane by the time it passes just to the South of the BVI. Although it's not as intense as Irma (which isn't saying much since Irma was the strongest storm ever recorded), it is much larger in area. Even though it's clipping along at 15 mph, we will experience tropical storm and hurricane conditions over most of two days, rather than the eight hours of terror we experienced with Irma.

Right now, it's a beautiful morning and today is supposed to good. We will start to feel nasty weather tomorrow morning, with rain and 40-60 mph winds. With sharp slices of galvanized roofing material flying around, it's possible it will be too dangerous for me to walk from my house to this place to get on the Internet. If so, my last update for a while could be a short status report at the end of the day today. By tomorrow afternoon, it's being reported that winds will pick up to 50-70 mph, increasing to 100 mph by nightfall. 5-8 inches of rain is expected.

By Wednesday morning, winds will reach 100-115 mph and another 5 inches of rain will fall. By Wednesday night, winds will still be approaching 100 mph and an additional 5" of rain could come down. By Thursday morning, winds will drop to 70-90 mph and by Thursday night, the storm will have passed. That means I will be holed-up, without the ability to communicate from, potentially, Monday night or Tuesday morning until Thursday night or Friday morning. You may not hear from me, but I'll be safe in my house.

In normal times, the BVI would almost be able to "shrug off" a hurricane like Maria. Now, this sort of storm will bring chaos and misery.

Last Friday, we had a flash flood that wreaked havoc. The town was completely underwater and buildings and cars were swamped. I haven't seen the statistics, but I'll bet all that flooding was caused by less than 6" of rainfall. The ground is saturated and the island's drainage system is completely wrecked. Even though we will not get a direct hit, Maria will bring steady rains and hurricane force winds for

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the better part of two days. It won't be safe to move because of all the flying debris. People's homes are already open to the sky. Where will everyone go? I wish this were a more positive update, but there's no way to put a positive spin on this storm.

Personally, I had a lot of help yesterday at my house. The places that were weakened or blown out by Irma are now buttoned-up about as well as can be. I was also able to get my car out of my driveway, make my way to town, and completely re-supply. I'm now stocked with plenty of water, pasta and sauces, and – wait for it – more oatmeal.

Sadly, the sidewall of my rear tire must have scraped a piece of metal roofing on the way home because my trusty Land Cruiser now sits in the driveway on a flat tire. Changing the tire will be my morning project. The 20-year-old beast started and ran well before the tire incident, but the engine and brake warning lights are now on, some of the windows won't come down, and the A/C no longer works. Somebody please tell Oprah I'm serious about that car thing.

On my drive to town, what stood out is how most houses seem to have almost exploded, with their walls, roof pieces, and all the contents flowing hundreds of feet down the sides of the hills. I'm not sure how the mess will ever be cleaned up. I guess new plant growth will eventually cover all galvanized roof panels and debris strewn over what seems like every square foot of the BVI. One of the British Commandos, who has been deployed in several war zones, said Tortola looked worse than any war zone he's been in. In a war zone, when bombs or shells hit buildings, the buildings and surrounding areas are leveled. Sometimes, large areas of a city are in rubble. In the BVI, the whole COUNTRY has been devastated.

When Irma was at its peak, I could look outside through a small window. The first thing I thought of at the time was a scene from a video I had seen years ago of nuclear bomb testing in the Bikini Islands after World War II. At the instant of the blast, the palm trees went completely horizontal. That's what Irma was like. It simply flattened, or snapped off, every single tree in the territory. Whole mountainsides are bare of vegetation down to the dirt.

A lot of people have been asking me where aid can be sent. I'll try to get some answers and post that information the next time I get online. Sending things here right now is pretty much impossible. A few local businesses tried to FedEx critical things from the States right after the storm, but the shipments are still sitting in Puerto Rico.

Commercial flights were set to resume, but Maria will no doubt stop those. In fact, all local planes will be flying out today to stay safe from the approaching storm. I assume the airport will close tonight as the winds pick up, but I don't have any information on that.

Sir Richard Branson has been a star. He, along with a few other people with jets, have been instrumental in providing urgent relief efforts.

I've been inundated with Friend requests from people who want to read my earlier posts. My Internet connection is better now, so I scrolled back through my timeline and made all my posts public from the day before the storm.

My updates will be suspended later today or first thing tomorrow morning because of Maria, but I will resume them and keep them going for a while, to continue to bring attention to our massive problems. The BVI is mostly out of the news cycle now, with North Korean missile launches, the bombing in London, the Florida recovery and, most noteworthy, the latest from the Kardashians.

For Maria, as with Irma, I've invited people to stay with me if they're at all concerned for their safety. I don't know how many will take me up on the offer. Presumably, all those who love oatmeal. Oatmeal's not just for breakfast anymore, you know.

4.23pm

This may, or may not, be my last report for a few days, depending on the weather in the morning. If the winds have kicked up too much, I may not attempt the walk over the hill to get an Internet connection. The last thing I need is to be struck by a piece of flying metal roofing.

Apparently, there's some confusion about the size and intensity of Hurricane Maria. From the latest I'm reading, Irma will be a Category 4 hurricane on Wednesday, but the eye will pass to our South. Sadly, the track is moving a bit closer to us, so we are now projected to get 125 mph winds. The high winds, coupled with debris already strewn everywhere, will create a very dangerous situation. The BVI will experience strong tropical storm or major hurricane conditions for the better part of two days, making life dire for the people whose homes have already been ripped apart.

If there's a shred of good news, it's that nearly all the escaped prisoners are now in custody. It won't be long before they're all captured.

Up to now, the restoration efforts have progressed faster than I had imagined. Maria will certainly set us back, but crews will be back to work immediately after it passes.

As I've mentioned, my access to the Internet is rationed. Sometimes my time online is very brief before my neighbor shuts-down his generator to conserve fuel. This morning, I was frantically trying to get my update posted and answer critical email while I had a signal. Please understand that I'd love to respond to all your questions and comments, but there's just not time. If everyone can limit their communications to me to Facebook posts and emails or private messages, that would be a big help. Avoid communication channels like WhatsApp, Slack, Skype, and text messages to my phone. So much is going on during the short periods I can get on the Internet. It can be overwhelming.

Thank you for all the oatmeal recipes I'm receiving. When the movie comes out, I'll make sure Quaker Oats gets prominent product placement.

20th September

I'm baaaack!

Hurricane Maria was a catastrophic Category 5 storm when it passed last night. In fact, it was reported this morning that it was one of the top 10 storms ever recorded in the Atlantic. Fortunately, it was far enough to our South that we didn't feel its full effects. We got strong tropical storm force winds and rain, but it didn't cause more widespread devastation. I'm sure there is quite a bit of new damage in the BVI, but it's nothing compared to what we got with Irma. We were very, very lucky. I haven't heard any reports from St. Croix, which would have been nearer to the eye, but I've heard there has been flooding on St. Thomas and the entire island of Puerto Rico is now without power. It's astonishing that we have been impacted by two of the ten strongest hurricanes ever recorded – and in one season.

At my place, I'm sheltering three people and four dogs. If you're wondering, these are the same two pairs of dogs that stayed with me after Irma. The dogs hate each other, but the owner of one of the pairs is now here and he's had a calming effect on his pets. We also have new procedures in place to keep the dogs separated and never in line of sight of each other.

Maria is moving well away now, and although there are still bands of rain, winds are dying down and the weather is slowly improving. Things are peaceful in the house and it's just like one, big happy family. This morning, it was oatmeal for everyone. Mmmmm.

I'm not a writer or journalist, but I try to use best journalistic practices for these updates. Except for the first day or two after Irma, when information was beyond scarce and I had to rely on the reports of others without verification, I since have written only about things I have seen with my own two eyes or gathered from the first-hand reports of others, after verification from a second source. I learned very quickly the sources that could be trusted.

I began this series of Facebook posts simply to update my friends and the people I care about. I wanted to provide an unfiltered and personal view of the situation on

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the ground. As my posts got re-posted and became more widely read, I felt a responsibility to continue them. The BVI was disappearing from the news cycle and I hoped my writings would help get the word out that our situation was still desperate.

Having said that, I've been told that my updates have not been positively received by some here. Some people felt, I was told, that my reporting of the negative news would keep tourists from coming back and would harm our recovery. I was very disturbed by this and considered stopping my posts.

After thinking things through during the passage of Maria, I've decided to continue, at least for a while, because some of the stories I've seen on the Internet have not been representative of what's really going on down here or they have been sensationalized.

We live in the age of Social Media, and the world knows about the many problems we had before the military arrived. They can't be hidden. I'm trying my very best to provide a balanced view and I hope the people who've complained represent a tiny minority.

Since I've heard stories that are wildly inaccurate and I've been asked many good questions via Private Message, I've decided to play a game of FACT or FICTION. The views expressed below are my own, so take this for what it's worth. Here goes...

"The UK was slow to respond and the initial response was poor." FICTION. I understand the UK Media criticized the efforts of the UK government immediately after Irma. While the French or Dutch may have reacted more swiftly (which was what was reported), it was only about a day before the UK military arrived in force, in wave after wave. Elite forces acted quickly to bring order to the territory and to start rounding up the escaped prisoners. They were instrumental in getting the airport up and running.

The Governor, newly appointed to his post here, has been outstanding. Yesterday, he reported the prison was secure, only seven low-risk prisoners remained at large, and military personnel were deployed at the prison, in addition to normal prison

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security staff, to keep the bad guys behind bars during the passage of Maria. From my perspective, the UK response has been terrific and I thank God for everything they've done.

“It will take years for the BVI to bounce back, if ever.” FICTION. The BVI was devastated, and still looks like a war zone, but I was astonished at the pace of the recovery and restoration process. I was seeing major progress, not just day to day, but from morning to evening curfew. The main food stores were open and even taking credit cards, some gas stations had reopened, and plenty of food and fuel was available. There were long lines because of panic buying, but I suspect things will be more normal from here on out since Maria has passed and the Governor has assured the public that we have large stocks of food, water and fuel. We had a setback with Hurricane Maria, but I expect efforts to pick up largely where they left off a couple days ago.

As I look ahead, it's my opinion that the charter boat industry will bounce back quickly, for several reasons. First, the BVI still has its beaches, its gorgeous weather, its dive sites and its natural wonders, like the Baths. At least 85% of the charter fleet here has been destroyed or badly damaged, but I understand a lot of the boats are repairable, assuming the Government enables the free-flow into the territory of skilled boat repair people from North America. If bureaucracy and friction is minimized, and the Free Enterprise system can work, the right skills will flow here, and they will be able get many boats operational again. Second, by their very nature, boats can move around. In a normal year, some boats relocate from the Med to the Caribbean around this time of year. I'm hoping whole fleets can be repositioned this year. Third, if a few restaurants and bars can be made operational on the outer islands, like Jost Van Dyke, Norman Island, Cooper Island, and others, charter boat tourism could be viable. Structures could be simple. If labor and materials flow, I believe the upcoming season could be salvageable.

Land-based tourism could take longer to come back, but there are already signs that some places will be ready to go before Christmas. Many restaurants and resorts suffered only minimal structural damage, even though they are still covered with debris. A half dozen restaurants scattered around Tortola are already open and serving. Near me, I have been told by management that Surfsong, Red Rock restaurant, and Penn's Landing marina will all be operational in December. Again,

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with the caveat that government allows labor and material to flow-in freely, some land-based tourism could be possible this season. And these are the tropics. As brown as the landscape looks now, we're in rainy season and the hills will be verdant again in a few short weeks.

“People are leaving and won't be coming back.” PARTLY FACT AND PARTLY FICTION. People who were born here are a resilient lot. Most folks are banding together, helping each other. My neighbor across the street, who has lived his whole life in the BVI, told me, “I believe everything happens for a reason. We should look at this as a wake-up call in the territory and consider it an opportunity for re-birth.” The clear majority of people who were born here, and Expats who have built their lives here, are staying and vowing to rebuild things better than ever.

Many, if not most, of the Expats that were on 1-2-year contracts, like teachers, managers, accountants and lawyers, for example, have probably already departed. With no vested interests here, I doubt they return. When they were desperate to get out, some left in shamefully bad ways, but that's human nature. Some people step and others don't in time of crisis. The BVI will be back and offer long-term opportunities, so many new people will come in to replace those who've left.

“The BVI is still in dire need of relief.” FACT. Thousands of people are living in deplorable conditions. Roofs are gone, as are windows and doors. Essential supplies, like generators, chainsaws, plywood and tarps are still in short supply.

With the main grocery stores and gas stations already open, a semblance of normal life was returning, pre-Maria. Some containers of food, water, clothing, diapers and other essential items, are already on the island. A lot of aid is reportedly in the pipeline, and will arrive soon. Maria put an abrupt stop to relief efforts, but I expect things to be back in full force tomorrow. The challenge, for groups like the local Rotary, is distribution. It's critical to quickly get these supplies to the people who need them the most throughout the territory.

I've seen crews only from our local electricity corporation on the roads, setting new poles and stringing wire. They're working tirelessly, but I was hoping I'd also

see trucks and crews from other places to help. Once power is restored to most areas, massive steps forward will be possible.

So far, most of our aid has been coming to us through Puerto Rico. Dozens of flights and boats were transiting back and forth daily. With Puerto Rico getting a direct hit from Maria, we will certainly feel a major impact.

21st September

Aaaah, life as a war correspondent. That's what I feel like. I just need someone to shoot video of me with the troops.

Maria has passed and the sun even started to peek out this morning for a couple minutes. We're still under a curfew, but I expect it to be lifted this morning. The curfew's been in place since Monday night, so, this morning, I won't be able to offer many eyewitness accounts of life beyond my house and its immediate vicinity. Once I'm able to get out again, I'll be able to share more.

It's amazing how very large boats got tossed around by Irma. There are 45' catamarans that have flipped upside down and some that are perched on the second stories of buildings. The live-aboard boat belonging to one of the people staying with me is resting on its side, well inland. It weighs 40,000 pounds. He has no idea how he's going to recover it. There's no way to get a crane to it by land and no way to get a barge to it by sea. Boats have sunk everywhere, often in navigable waters, blocking other boats from coming in or going out of some marinas.

Hurricane Maria did far less damage than Irma, but many boats that were OK the first time around, sank during Maria. One of my guests will attempt to save three large sailboats today that are slowly sinking. They have no power and, therefore, no working bilge pumps. He's frantically trying to go from one boat to another via a dinghy with a portable generator and water pump. So far, he's managed to pump water out at about the same rate it's been flowing in. Obviously, this is not a sustainable situation.

A few days ago, I mentioned that I pried the cover off the cistern under my kitchen and had access to 30,000 gallons of rainwater. We've used this water for cleaning,

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washing dishes and flushing toilets. It's been very convenient. That's the good news. The bad news is we've discovered mosquito larvae in the buckets of water we've hoisted up. In normal times, the solution is to release a few guppies into the cistern to eat the larvae, but where am I going to find guppies now? I've been evaluating my options in dealing with this and none of them are good.

It's been more than two weeks since Irma roared through and we're all covered by cuts, bites and skin rashes. It ain't pretty.

Dinner last night was almost civilized, however, as my guests and I were able to enjoy some nice wine with our nightly pasta. It's pretty much been pasta every night and, as anyone who has been reading my posts will know, Quaker Oats brand oatmeal is my morning staple. Note that I'm providing the brand name of the oatmeal now. I'm hoping for a rich endorsement deal from The Quaker Oats Company, in Chicago, Illinois, when all this is over. The container says I can call 1-800-555-OATS with my comments.

This morning, all the people and pets I sheltered during Hurricane Maria have gone. A jar of dog treats got left behind. I wonder how that stuff would taste on pasta? The dogs love it.

Stay tuned.

22 September

First, my thoughts and prayers go out to the people of Puerto Rico, St. Croix, and the other islands devastated by Maria. They felt the full fury of the storm. We were just swiped by it.

The San Juan airport (SJU) represents a lifeline to the BVI so their dire situation will have a direct impact on us, for sure. SJU will re-open for commercial flights today. A lot of our aid was being consolidated there, before being loaded on planes headed for the BVI. I don't know what effect this will have on the BVI-bound supplies that were already in San Juan, or our supply chain going forward. Several small container ships were making regular journeys back and forth to PR and I'm sure those runs will be affected in some way.

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Here in the BVI, post-Maria, we're back on a bumpy road to recovery. Progress is everywhere, and several more bars and restaurants have restored some basic kitchen functions.

There's still marshal law and nightly curfews, but the sense of danger and panic has passed. Our airport is on Beef Island, and I live on a hill, around the corner from the airport. The military has based itself there. Every night, from my vantage point, I see caravans of vehicles leave for nightly patrols. These are usually local rental cars, filled with marines in full combat gear and armed with automatic weapons.

While Maria was subsiding, a few people tried to seize the opportunity and loot unoccupied properties. Eight people were caught and immediately taken to jail. There's a zero tolerance to looting and the government is encouraging anyone with videos of the initial episodes to come forward so the perpetrators can be identified and dealt with.

Except for the isolated incident I just described, the BVI seems like a safe place again. Even though major food stores and gas stations have reopened – and there's plenty of food, water and fuel – there's still panic buying of fuel for some reason. Gas stations have long lines that tie up traffic for what seems like miles. A journey to town that would normally take 20 minutes can now take 2 hours. The Governor has made it clear that plenty of fuel is now on the island and there's no need for this panic buying, but people keep doing it.

More transport planes and ships are arriving daily, bringing supplies in and taking people out, but my biggest news this morning is that the HMS Ocean has arrived, which is the largest warship in the Royal Navy. It's dropped anchor and I'm looking at it right now, along with a couple of other container ships off-shore. The UK government relocated it from the Med, where it was assisting with refugees.

The Ocean is carrying 60 tons of aid for us, including more than 5,000 hygiene kits and 500,000 water purification tablets. It has onboard nine helicopters and 200 personnel, four landing craft and ten 4X4 trucks, that were donated by Gibraltar. It can generate electricity to supply eight thousand homes. Unfortunately, there's no

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way to get that power to all our homes and businesses without power poles and lines. I understand the Ocean has torpedo defense, so that makes me feel even safer. :-)

Power has been restored to sections of the territory now, but the Electricity Corporation has warned that some wires might now be live – which is obviously a dangerous situation. There are fallen and cut wires everywhere.

Mosquitoes continue to be a major problem, but programs are being implemented to deal with them island-wide. Thanks for all your suggestions for dealing with the mosquito larvae I have in my cistern. With the local branch of “Guppies R Us” still closed, I’ll have to find a different solution. Regarding the Clorox idea, my main problem with that approach is that my cistern is divided into three chambers and there’s no way to circulate the Clorox. Your thoughts and leads have been very helpful, though, and I’m sure I’ll get that problem solved today – or very shortly.

If I can get less restricted access to the Internet, that will be huge for me, as I still don’t have any communication (or power or running water) at my house.

One of my neighbors has a generator and that’s how I’ve been able to post these updates every day, but my time windows have been limited since they’re trying to conserve diesel. I’ve been able to wash daily but, last night, I enjoyed my first hot shower since Sept 6th. Not only was I able to get a hot shower, I relished a great curry meal with friends, along with some nice wine, so I didn’t have to resort to eating the leftover doggie treats. This morning, I again savored a delicious bowl of Quaker Oats brand oatmeal, manufactured by The Quaker Oats Company, headquartered in Chicago, Illinois. Life is good.

As of yesterday, I’m no longer sheltering any people or pets at my house. I need to start attending to essential things for myself, like taking inventory of everything that needs to be repaired or replaced, documenting my losses with photographs, and filing insurance claims.

There’s nothing brewing in the Atlantic right now, but the reality is that we’re only about two-thirds of the way through the 2017 hurricane season and, historically,

the most violent storms usually happen later in the season. Fingers crossed. I think we deserve a break down here. ‘Ya think?

My crack writing staff needs a well-deserved pause so, unless things ratchet-up for some reason, I am going to cease daily, scheduled posting. Instead, I’ll post irregularly, when there are major developments or when we achieve important milestones. You know, like if there’s an island-wide oatmeal shortage.

9.19pm

Thank you, Sarah Robinson, for creating Quaker Oats’ next product release...
“Love your posts. The Quaker Oats Company of Chicago, Illinois better step up their game. There’s a new face of Oatmeal in town.
#QuakerChuck TM



24th September

The BVI is a beehive of activity. With the HMS Ocean anchored offshore, helicopters take-off and land on it throughout the day. Big, twin-rotored Chinooks carry large loads, slung underneath, to Tortola and neighboring islands. Landing craft shuttle back and forth to the mother-ship multiple times daily. Again, thank you, UK. What on earth would we do here without your help?

The airport is still closed to commercial traffic, with only aid flights coming in and evacuations going out. Traffic is tightly slotted and, up to today, it seemed like some kind of aircraft was either taking off or landing every few minutes throughout the day.

As of now, only aid workers are being let in. I'm sure things will change soon, but even property owners are prohibited from entering the territory until we get past the emergency stage. And, make no mistake, despite massive progress, the BVI is still in a desperate state. Everything's relative.

Mosquitoes continue to be an enormous problem. As I type this, I am being swarmed by them. Despite being slathered in Deep Woods Off and flailing about with my electronic swatter, they are aggressive and persistent little buggers. I just killed a pair of mating mosquitoes on my thigh with a single swat. That was very satisfying for me. And if you're a mosquito, it's probably the way you'd want to go.

I've added some Clorox to my cistern to kill the larvae and managed to stir things around a bit. Yesterday, I borrowed a Black Flag mosquito fogger. Before bedtime, except for my bedroom, I fired it up and fogged the entire house before closing the doors behind me. This morning? I don't notice much of a difference. The mosquitoes are still here in mass, but now they're vengeful.

Yesterday, I drove to an aid point, in search of mosquito dunks and water purification tablets. I saw crews onshore from the HMS Ocean, carrying handsaws, sledgehammers and chainsaws. They were moving from house to house, helping local people board their roofs and make other emergency repairs. Centers have been set up at multiple places on the island for people to request help from these teams. It's great to see. Information is not very good yet about what's available where, so the help center I went to didn't have the water purification tabs and

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mosquito dunks I needed. I was told I will have to go to a different place on Monday to get those things.

I had not driven to town for almost two days before venturing out and I was shocked at the progress. Debris is being gathered and consolidated, then being picked up by excavators and trucked away. It's very sad to see the widespread devastation, but at least things are looking more orderly along the roads.

The boats are another matter. They're still piled everywhere in massive jumbles. During Irma, I witnessed what looked to be 40' waves hammering the shore behind my house. The storm surge was reported to be in the 10-11' range and even boats that were secured in "safe" locations were wrecked. Hundreds of large catamarans are piled on top of one other. Many are in places that can't be reached by cranes from the land or from barges. Some weigh tens of thousands of pounds and they're too heavy for even the Chinook helicopters to lift away. I have no idea how a number of them will be removed. Once they're drained of diesel and their batteries are taken out, I imagine most will be sunk somewhere. It would be interesting to create new artificial reefs from a collection of these wrecked boats. Boat surveyors and divers have been assessing the damage, but very little has been done since Irma struck to start moving or repairing them.

The government has reported that power will be restored in four months; water in 45 days. Portable generators and a supply of larger diesel generators should start arriving in stores this coming week. Fortunately, there is very little price gouging and most merchants are selling food and essential supplies at regular prices or even discounts, to help.

I have commented several times in my posts about the importance of the government reducing the "friction" to speed the recovery. I'm pleased to report that the government will not be charging duty on essential equipment and supplies for the next three months. Government has also relaxed labor and immigration policies to expedite the processing of skilled workers that will be needed to support businesses in the rebuilding process.

If you've been following my writings for the past couple of weeks, you've probably seen several people comment that this should be made into a movie.

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Videos and still pictures probably give you an idea of the widespread devastation. What you don't hear are the personal stories, told in the voices of those affected.

There are hundreds, if not thousands, of personal stories of gritty survival against all odds. Some people were trapped in small spaces with waters rising and they nearly drowned. Others were huddled in places they considered safe, only to watch the structures around them disintegrate, bit by bit, with the roofs lifting off or the walls collapsing. Many people I have spoken to have told me tales of having only seconds to make life or death decisions. Before suffering through a total building collapse or being dragged out by the wind or water, they moved to a different place they hoped wouldn't be destroyed, as well. And they had to make these moves while winds were blowing debris at a sustained 185mph, gusting to well over 200mph.

One person I spoke to had only seconds to move herself and her two dogs to a small concrete cubbyhole. Another man saw his daughter being dragged out of the side of his house that had given way. He managed to throw a piece of plywood on her and fall on top. She was injured but his action prevented her from being swept away and protected her body from falling roof sections.

People recount stories that range from losing their doors and windows to losing their roofs to losing all their worldly possessions. Each time I hear one of these stories, though, it ends the same way. After they're finished, they all say, "But I have life."

25th September

When I awoke this morning, the HMS Ocean was nowhere to be seen. I'm praying it's just been moved to another BVI location and didn't leave the territory. That would be bad.

CHUCK FORWARDED THIS POST FROM HIS NEIGHBOUR, OLIVIA NEWLING WARD:

I've been getting a few messages asking for updates so here we go.

It will be 3 weeks since Irma and 1 week since Maria on Wednesday. I've had bad days and I've had good days, but mostly days where I try keep myself busy to avoid thinking about the reality of the situation. The island is still without power but slowly running water is being restored. I'm lucky enough to be staying with people who have a generator which allows me a few hours of electricity in the morning and night. It still weighs on me that this is a temporary solution and the clock is ticking for me to make some tough decisions about my immediate future. Everyday the idea of moving off island for a bit is being sold to me by people around me. It becomes more and more appealing when you make the drive into town from Beef Island and realize you aren't going to wake up from the nightmare for at least a few more months. Somewhat demoralizing but you make it work because in the end, you have life and that's a blessing.

To be fair, there has been incredible progress throughout the islands and people are working extremely hard. I have so much love and respect for everyone who goes out there everyday to make a difference and do some good. Restaurant owners have started cooking free meals for children throughout the community, educational programs are being put in place, volunteers are everywhere, even the marines are in people's homes helping them rebuild. (Also huge shout-out to the armed forces. You are all incredible and I appreciate everything you do. I never truly understood the value of the armed forces but seeing these men and women out there helping clear debris, restoring law and order to ensure everyone's safety, providing aid and supplies, all with smiles on their faces. It's amazing and it has made me appreciate being part of a family that has so many members who have served from my grandparents, my dad, uncles and aunts to many of my cousins. Even managed to salvage my dad's naval medals from the rubble!)

Speaking of family – one of my cousins has been incredibly thoughtful and put together a crowdfunding page to help my family rebuild our lives. I'm not one for personal plugs but if you're interested in donating or sharing, my family and I are

more than appreciative. Thanks so much! (<https://www.justgiving.com/crowdfunding/bvi>)

Going through an event like this puts everything into perspective. Every story of survival during Irma in the BVI is different. My story was kind of intense but the gist of it is I rode out the worst of the storm in a small cupboard of a laundry room with two dogs while the roof blew off sections of the house. Chunks of concrete were falling from the ceiling inside the room, hence the need to squeeze into this cupboard. At the end of the day the dogs and I emerged unharmed, albeit a bit shaken up. I was then discovered by the neighbor (who is becoming somewhat famous on Facebook with his daily accounts post-Irma entitled the “Oatmeal Diaries.” He’s awesome, check him out if you haven’t. Chuck Krallman)

3 weeks on and I’ve been back into work a few times and have tried to resume some sort of normal life but the destruction is a lot to take in daily. Either way, staying positive and active is the only way to ensure that you come out of this situation stronger, and as a better person. For me at least. Still debating about this moving off island thing, but until then just going to try to keep doing some good around here.

So much love to you all and thanks for your daily messages. It keeps me going.

26 September

Progress is happening daily here in the BVI, but the challenges are daunting due to the sheer scale of the devastation. People are cleaning up their properties and crews are busy, replacing power poles and stringing wire. Electricity has been restored to just a few places so far. The government estimates all power will be restored within four months. Once power is back, it will be a game changer, even for those lucky enough to have functioning generators. When we get to that point, rebuilding efforts can happen in earnest.

There are no commercial flights yet, though military and aid flights continue daily. Our air travel situation has been complicated by extensive damage to the airports on our neighboring islands. Even private jet flights to the mainland are yet not

allowed because the tower that controls private aviation traffic within 200 miles of San Juan has been destroyed.

Our local news is reporting that our prison inmates are being transferred to the prison in St. Lucia because our prison was heavily damaged and needs to be rebuilt. Our Governor handled this whole jailbreak situation very well. The UK military was able to round up nearly all the 150 escapees within a matter of a few days. I had originally heard there were 130 prisoners, but now the number is being reported as 150. I understand six low-risk prisoners are still at large, but I think we can essentially now check this problem off our list.

In other news, our government has announced that it will be creating a special business development fund for local businesses. It's being reported that businesses will be able to apply for loans within the next two weeks. Most of our banks have already announced grace periods for personal and other loan repayments. A lot of aid is now here and it's being distributed to those in greatest need first, like the sick and elderly. I understand there's no requirement anymore for clothing items.

As for me, I've been able to hire some help to clear my property of debris and begin cleanup inside. Since every house in the BVI has been damaged, most severely, good contractors are in huge demand. Several thousand people will be trying to get the services of a handful of qualified builders at the same time. The timing of reconstruction at my house will mostly depend on when power is restored and when I can get materials shipped from the mainland. If anyone tries to take advantage, they need to know that, like Santa, I'm keeping a list of who's been naughty and who's been nice.

Although a few plants are budding and some ground cover is turning green, the larger trees are pretty much gone. Nearly all coconut and foxtail palms were either uprooted or broken in half. Mature shade trees have been all but wiped out, either stripped of branches down to their lower trunks, or snapped off entirely. Twenty days after Irma, the hillsides are still brown and look barren of life. When one drives around the island, one sees homes and even streets that have never been exposed. There will be no privacy in the BVI for a while...

With their food sources mostly gone, birds, insects, and other assorted critters have become incredibly aggressive. Any door left open for breeze is an invitation to birds to fly in and pick through fruit and packages of food left on counters. Besides the omnipresent mosquitoes, I've seen some of the largest land crabs and spiders EVER. And I mustn't forget to mention the rats. Food not packaged in tins or glass containers are easy targets for them. Even though I've been careful, I wasn't spared from getting rats in my kitchen and storage room. They tend to sample a few bites from every container they can chew their way into. A veritable smorgasbord for our rodent friends.

I hate to segue from rats to restaurants, but more restaurants have been opening, with limited menus and hours. Despite sustaining a lot of damage, my favorite restaurant on the island, Brandywine, opened for Sunday lunch. The place was packed. Kudos to Chef Regis for making life almost civilized for an afternoon. It was a surreal experience, sipping wine and eating steak with peppercorn sauce, while Chinook military helicopters passed overhead, dangling their payloads.

Irma was an equal opportunity storm, affecting everyone, rich and the poor alike. One managing partner of law firm here lost everything when his house essentially exploded. Somehow, his prized 1961 Margaux was spared. It was a gift from a client and he had been saving it for decades. But, as he was carrying his few remaining possessions to new, temporary housing, the plastic bag holding the bottle broke. He licked what he could from the plastic bag, almost hoping it had gone bad. He said it was delicious.

All of us here look like contestants that failed to go the distance on an episode of "Naked and Afraid." We're sunburned, covered with heat rash, bug bites and scrapes, and we've all lost weight. Daily life is a struggle for everyone, young and old; rich and poor.

Now that the initial terror of the storm has passed and we are cleaning up, most of us have fallen into routines. To give you a sense of what daily life is like now on Tortola, I thought I'd describe a typical "Day in the Life of Chuck"

Mornings come early in the Krallman household. I always wake up before the sun rises at 6:00am because of the rooster that has made its home beneath my window.

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Sometimes, during the night, I get awakened by a muscle cramp caused by dehydration. It's hard to drink enough water through the day and the nights are sweltering hot. There's no breeze on my side of the mountain this time of year, no fan or A/C, and my shutters are still on. Like me, I imagine pretty much everyone sleeps in a pool of sweat. Even those lucky enough to have generators tend to turn them off at night to conserve fuel. So, this morning, when the leg cramp woke me up, I guzzled down the bottle of water beside my bed, walked it off as best I could, then tried in vain to go back to sleep

.

At sunrise, I finally got out of bed and made my way to the kitchen. I applied a thick topcoat of Deep Woods Off, then filled my kettle with "clean-ish" water. I snapped the trigger of my Bernz-O-Matic plumber's torch to instantly light my stove. Almost everyone here has gas ovens, so even without electricity, we can all cook. The problem, of course, is that we don't have power, so there's no refrigeration. Generally, we're eating only non-perishable foods.

Once again, I enjoyed a delicious bowl of Quaker Oats brand oatmeal for breakfast, manufactured by the Quaker Oats Company in Chicago, Illinois, along with a cup of instant coffee.

After breakfast, I usually dip a few buckets into my cistern to replenish water supplies needed throughout the house for daily cleaning and toilet flushing.

By around 7:30am, I wrap my laptop and notepad in a garbage bag in case of rain, then into a carrier bag, for the sweaty walk up the hill to the house that provides me rationed Internet. They run their generator a few hours twice each day to conserve their diesel, in the mornings and early evenings. I catch up on Facebook, emails and business for an hour or two, then pack my things and return to my house.

Sometimes, the whole day can be spent picking up debris and cleaning. Furnishings and fixtures that appeared undamaged immediately after the storm are now going bad because everything got bathed in salt. Any item made of metal is now rusting or pitting badly.

Today, I needed to travel to town to resupply and go in search of critically needed repair items. Most stores (that have opened) have restricted hours, long lines, and accept cash only. And the drive to town, which normally takes only 20 minutes, can easily take two hours each way. I'll usually have to search several stores to get everything I need on my list, with long waits everywhere. Between the traffic congestion and the lines in stores, a simple shopping trip can blow most of a day.

As an aside, most of the cars here are heavily damaged, with some missing their windshields. Many times, I'll see the occupants wearing scuba masks, which looks almost cartoonish. But, I digress. Back on topic...

By 5:00-6:00pm, I'll grab my laptop and notepad and head up the hill to the neighbor house again. This time, I'll also pack my flashlight, a towel, my toiletries and a fresh shirt in my bag. Perhaps a nice bottle of wine from my stock, too. Anyone who's visited my house knows I have enough wine and spirits to last until the Armageddon, so I'm covered there.

While the generator is running during the early evening slot, several of us usually meet at that house. We take turns getting showers and we cook a communal dinner. Most often, our menu consists of a pasta dish with a prepared sauce and a nice bottle of wine. We talk about what we all did and saw that day. It's simple, but pleasant.

After we say our goodbye's, I walk back to my house. At 8:00pm, the curfew is in force. It's dark outside. It's hot and there's no breeze. With my flashlight and my electric mosquito zapper, I try to rid my bedroom of mosquitoes as best I can.

And that, my friends, is a typical day in the life of Chuck right now.

27th September

There are now bugs in my oatmeal. I remained calm through Irma and Maria, but this could put me over the edge.

28 September

First, the good news. The mosquitoes seem to be subsiding somewhat. They're not gone, but they are fewer in number and less aggressive. Less aggressive would not describe the Thrasher birds, which are obnoxious under the best of circumstances. One landed on my table this morning and attempted to eat my oatmeal. While I was eating it! I'm, of course, referring to Quaker brand oatmeal, manufactured by The Quaker Oats Company of Chicago, Illinois. Zip Code 60606.

One of my Facebook friends suggested I add a Bay leaf to my carton of oatmeal to repel the bugs. Apparently, that solution also works with flour and cornmeal. Who knew? So, I believe I have a new product suggestion for Quaker. I think they should introduce a special "Survival" variant, with a Bay leaf already added to the container. Quaker Oats: available in Instant, Old Fashioned and Survival varieties. You heard it here first.

The BVI is settling-in to what will be a long, arduous road to recovery. I understand power will be switched on in one section of town today. The Electricity Corporation crews are making steady progress in getting the main transmission lines up, though the vast majority of the island is still without power.

Let me be clear – we are still in an emergency situation, but our needs are shifting. Immediately after Irma, we were desperate for essentials like water and food. Some people had only the clothing they were wearing. With prisoners on the loose, we were afraid for our safety and urgently needed the military for protection and to restore order. Thankfully, that time has passed. We are safe, aid has arrived and, though there are long lines, there's plenty of food in our stores and gas at our gas stations.

The island, though, is a monumental mess with debris everywhere and boats in massive piles, many de-masted and upside down. Tortola still looks like a war zone, more than three weeks after Irma struck.

Most people are cleaning up mountains of debris and making temporary repairs. Even the most basic and temporary repair efforts will undoubtedly go on for months and months. It's going to be a tough slog to get things cleaned up and back to where they were, pre-storm. Frankly, I expect a few more people will "bugger

off” once they get a better handle on how difficult it will be to rebuild their lives and businesses and evaluate their options.

Having said that, a few have started shifting to long-term rebuilding efforts. Several tourist-related businesses and charter fleets will be up and running shortly. For others, this coming season will be lost. Some charter boats that had a loyal following have been destroyed and it will be hard for them to recover. It may take a couple of seasons.

While the BVI is having its troubles, other Caribbean destinations are seizing this opportunity to snatch business this season and long-term share of market, with negative campaigns. Other tourist destinations that were not as affected are stepping up their marketing efforts. Cruise ships are rerouting.

I understand some Financial Services companies in at least one other jurisdiction (I won’t name names) are claiming the BVI is dead and encouraging companies to relocate there. Of course, the BVI isn’t dead and our Financial Services sector is strong. It was one of the first things up and running after the storm.

There is absolutely no doubt in my mind the BVI will completely recover from this. All the elements that made us a thriving center for tourism and financial services are still there. In fact, if the Government uses Irma as a “reset” button and removes some “friction” from the system to make it easier for businesses to operate here, we could emerge even stronger and more vibrant than before.

But, for the BVI to recover, the hard reality is that we need cash. Cash must flow into the territory from the outside in large sums in the form of insurance proceeds, direct investment, charities and donations, company formations, and tourist dollars. To all those who want to help, my message is simple. Travel to the BVI, Invest in the BVI, and Buy in the BVI.

I am absolutely swamped with work now and need to concentrate on cleanup, insurance issues, ordering needed materials, dealing with contractors, and earning a living. I know lots of people are following me, but please be understanding. For many personal reasons, I need to suspend my regular Facebook entries for a while.

I may pop-on every now and then, post some pics from the storm, or make an entry if there's something newsworthy, but things are now falling into a routine.

I apologize if I haven't responded to some questions, private messages, or Friend requests, but I've been inundated. Cell service is still not available at my house and basic communications continue to be a challenge. Your prayers and kind words of encouragement have been overwhelming during these trying times and have meant a lot to me. Thank you.

All things considered, I've been very lucky. I fared better than most and I have life.

...And my giant Unicorn pool float. So I've got that going for me. Which is nice.

29 september

OK, OK. Yesterday, I said I was going to cease posting for a while. I said I would pop-on only if I had something interesting to relate. Well, I do have some new comments and musings...

I live on the East End of Tortola and my observations so far have been limited mostly to what I have seen on my end of the island. Yesterday, I spoke to several people who live or have businesses on West End and in Road Town. They told me things I hadn't heard or been able to see myself.

A prominent businessman who operates several locations around the BVI told me he was hit hard by looters before the military arrived. At one of his locations, the looters used a chainsaw to cut through the shutters protecting his store and removed all his merchandise, including some heavy sweaters, which would be of no use in the BVI. Similar things happened at his other stores and warehouse. One of the largest liquor distributors was completely emptied of all its stock. Most of the stories I heard were like this. The looting was not done by people desperate for food or essentials for their families. These crimes were blatant and happened in broad daylight. I understand there's video, capturing several of the incidents.

After Maria hit, I reported the military had captured several looters, caught in the act. Sadly, I learned that the first seven were sentenced to community service.

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Community service? Really? Would you want these people working on your home or in your yard? If anyone in Government reads these posts, and any of the perpetrators are from other islands, I hope you can find a way to deport them. We don't need these people in the BVI as we rebuild our future.

I also met someone from a construction company in the States who said he was considering creating temporary housing. This got me thinking that one of our biggest problems will be housing the people who need to come down to rebuild. We'll need hundreds, if not thousands, of workers with the right skills and there's no housing stock available.

While there will be a huge need for construction workers and skilled tradesmen, there will be little need for most administrative workers for a while. There's going to be a massive shift in the make-up of our workforce, with some people facing the prospect of long-term unemployment and others in enormous demand. Obviously, this is going to create a massive social and security challenge.

The tourism industry is based around the beauty of the BVI and our natural wonders. It is almost guaranteed to completely recover, given time. In my view, our Financial Services industry is more fragile. Several law firms relocated their lawyers to their offices in other jurisdictions after the storm. It would not be shocking for these temporary relocations to become permanent, which would have a multiplier effect on the BVI economy, since that would result in the loss of support staff, as well as the lawyers. If some of the BVI Financial Services companies permanently move their staff to other jurisdictions, it would be a double-whammy. Again, if anyone in Government is reading this, now is the time to take all steps necessary to ensure all these firms return to the BVI.

I had previously reported on the sustained winds of Irma, the atmospheric equivalent of a giant Salad Shooter, were 185mph, with higher gusts. At my house, I noted that winds were at their highest level for at least an hour before we entered the eye. I spoke to a military guy yesterday and, based on what he told me, my numbers may be a wee-bit low. He said the military measured the winds at a sustained 200mph+, with gusts to 285mph and tornadoes spinning off from there. You heard me right, I said more than TWO HUNDRED miles per hour. That's even too windy for the kite surfers.

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If my rudimentary physics calculations are correct, that means the force exerted on a shutter of 4'X8' plywood, covering a large window or a set of doors, would receive over 10,000 pounds of force. It's amazing that any shutter or door stayed on at all.

There's a widely circulated photo of a 60' catamaran sitting on top of a building, more than 500 feet from where it was secured. The boat probably weighs more than 50,000 pounds. It wasn't put there by the storm surge. It was lifted by the wind, all 50,000 pounds of it, and landed on top of the building. We're not in Kansas anymore, Toto.

I've mentioned in a previous post that rats have become a problem. Yesterday, I went into my home office and there was a large rat, sitting right in my leather office chair. I'll let you make up your own joke on this one.

So many have commented that they will continue to visit and support the BVI it gives me great hope for the future. I don't know the vast majority of people who have offered me their support and encouragement, but please Private Message me if you come down. I'd love to meet you in person. Given the number who've said they want to buy me a drink, I figure I'm set for beer until about the year 2024.

1st October

It's being reported that commercial flights could start coming and going from our Beef Island airport as soon as tomorrow, October 2nd. This will be a huge step forward when it happens, but it's not a done deal yet. The resumption of commercial flights must be approved by the civil aviation regulatory authority for the BVI and other British Overseas Territories. Security screening will be in place and the public is being warned to expect very long lines. Remember, everyone, no machetes in your carry-on's.

A lot of people have Private Messaged me about wanting to come down to help. Many feel powerless in the States and want to support spouses or loved ones. To everyone who messages me on this subject, I say the same thing. It's just too soon. Wait for things to normalize a bit. The situation on the ground is gradually getting

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better and we might be talking only about a week or two, but not now. Even if commercial flights are restored tomorrow as planned, only a small fraction of the BVI has power and/or water. Communications are spotty, at best. Although I can get a cell signal if I walk over the hill behind my house, there's still no digital data at my place so I can't receive emails or instant messages. There's very little habitable housing and, with no A/C or fans, and lots of very aggressive bugs and assorted vermin, conditions are, well, bad. Until things are a little further along, come only if you have a very, VERY good reason to do so.

I keep hearing talk that the military will be leaving the BVI. There's enough smoke to this story that there could be fire, but I've heard nothing definitive yet. Although our escaped prisoners have been rounded up and are now in a St. Lucia jail, there's certainly still a need for them and I hope they stay for a while.

Despite the government asking people to not burn brush, debris, or garbage, there are daily fires being started everywhere. And all sorts of stuff is getting burned, not just tree limbs. When I drive through East End, I smell burning rubber and God knows what else. The acrid smoke blows over populated areas and settles there, like 70's era smog over LA. Health-wise, it can't be good.

There's a storied ruin around the corner from my house, probably dating back to the 1600's, that allegedly carries with it the curse of murdered pirates. I can report the ruin is now even more ruined. Maybe there was something to that curse...

If you've just started reading my posts, and you have some time on your hands and are interested, it's probably worthwhile going back to September 6th and tracing through my Timeline. To those of you who've been following me from the beginning, FYI, I've still heard nothing from Oprah regarding the car nor have I gotten a lifetime supply of delicious Quaker brand oatmeal from The Quaker Oats Company of Chicago, Illinois, Zip Code 60606.

Again, please understand that I'm absolutely inundated with personal tasks right now and will be for the coming weeks. It's very difficult for me to respond to PM's and I regret that I've not been able to answer everyone's questions. Right now, I need to get my insurance claim filed as soon as possible and the amount of work that must go into that is daunting. I appreciate your support and encouragement

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more than you can imagine, but my posting will need to be irregular and less frequent. I'll post only if there's something I think is noteworthy.

It's a scary thought if storms like Irma become the "new normal" because of rising ocean temperatures. On a positive note, global warming will mean that my new dog and cat-shaving business should really take off and, soon, I'll be able to cook my lobster simply by lowering it into the toilet.

Subsequent updates since we first published the diaries

22 December 2017

I haven't written an update of life in the BVI for a while. I've been busy staging an epic comeback.

The truth is, I'm not a big social media guy. I don't post pictures of my cheese sandwich or re-post videos of a cat whirling around on a ceiling fan. I wrote about my daily experiences after the storm to report to my friends what life was really like. I was lucky enough to have access to an Internet connection for an hour or two a day. After a few days had passed and more people started following my posts, I felt an obligation to continue because news from the BVI was either non-existent or sensationalized.

So, let's just say I'm back by popular demand. Since I last posted, I spent a few weeks in South Florida, putting a container together of materials and supplies for my house reconstruction. Several of my friends generously put me up, and I moved from one place to another as soon as I outlived my welcome. :-)) I felt like a homeless guy, pushing all my belongings along in a shopping cart, from one house to another. In fact, after I left a friend's home in Naples, his neighbors asked, "What happened to the homeless guy?"

Folks always asked where I was from and, hearing that I lived in the BVI and experienced the hurricanes, it always generated conversation. People fell into two

camp. First, there were those who couldn't wait to tell me stories of their own horrific hurricane Irma experience in Florida:

"Oh, my God! We got hit by Irma just like you. We lost power for a whole day! Limbs were down everywhere. And our screen door in the back blew off! Do you believe it? It blew completely OFF!"

"No way! You guys really got slammed," I said.

"Have you heard they still don't have power in Puerto Rico?"

"I know," I said. "It's a horrible situation in Puerto Rico. But a lot of people on Tortola still don't have power."

"Seriously? Nobody ever talks about that on the news. All we hear about is Puerto Rico. I thought the Virgin Islands were fine."

And I believe that's what most people think. The Virgin Islands were in the news cycle for about two days before Rocket Man launched a missile over Japan or there was a controversial Presidential tweet or another Kardashian got knocked-up. Puerto Rico continues to stay in the news because the situation there is very bad and there are MILLIONS of Puerto Ricans. The BVI is a tiny speck on the map. Unless you were planning a vacation in the BVI this season, we're out of sight, out of mind.

The second camp of people were those who wanted to hear every detail of my experience. As I recounted the stories of what it was like during the storm, wildly gesturing to describe chunks of my neighbor's house flying over mine, or telling them about the escaped prisoners who were hiding in my neighbor's house one night, they got wide-eyed. "Wow, we didn't hear THAT on the news," they would say. In person, I was also able to tell them the stories I didn't want to put in my Facebook posts for various reasons. (You know who you are...)

I understand people's curiosity, but every time I'd have to re-tell the stories, it would dredge up the memories. Sometimes, I'd be asked to tell the tales several times per day. Each time, it was hard. And whether they admit it or not, everyone

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who went through the storms and lived through the immediate aftermath has been affected emotionally. Some people lost their homes or their businesses. Some people lost absolutely everything. Many of my friends had near death experiences. I think most people, even if they didn't face a life or death situation, still wake up in the middle of the night, in a sweat. Certainly, everybody's lives have been turned upside down. The reality is that life in the BVI is still pretty hard for a lot of people.

Having said that, you can see progress everywhere. Electricity has been restored most places (even on Virgin Gorda, Jost, and Anegada), businesses and restaurants are re-opening, roads are being repaired, and the massive mess is being cleaned up. Today, the curfew was finally lifted.

The BVI desperately needs tourist dollars to get the economy going and put people back to work. But many businesses, hotels, and restaurants need to be rebuilt and the biggest thing holding back headway – and the thing that's keeping a lot of people awake at night – is that our insurance companies aren't yet paying out. It's been more than three months since Irma and none of the people I know have received a penny. Insurance companies must be overwhelmed with claims, but there's been no transparency on how many claims, or how much money, has been paid. I suspect it's a tiny amount. Someone on Facebook posted, "Irma didn't kill the BVI, but the insurance companies might." Insurance money **MUST** flow in to cover the staggering \$3.6B (yes, that's Billion with a "B") in losses. Without that money, most people can't rebuild and many businesses won't be able to re-open, which means many will be without jobs. It's stifling our growth.

I get asked by people all the time about whether they should vacation in the BVI this year. If you're considering a charter boat vacation, my answer is a resounding YES! C'mon down! It will be different, for sure, but it will be a good experience. The temperature is warm and the breezes are balmy. The water is clear and beautiful. The Baths are still the Baths and there's great snorkeling and diving everywhere. With fewer charter boats and cruise ships roaming the waters, bays and beaches are uncrowded. It's like going back in time. It's like a throwback to the 70's.

Many beach bars and restaurants on the outlying islands have already re-opened. The Soggy Dollar is back, along with Hendo's, two of my favorite places on Jost Van Dyke. Foxy's is open, as well as Pirate's at the Bight on Norman Island. Cocomaya has reopened on Virgin Gorda. There's no problem getting food and you'll find a great selection of everything when you're provisioning.

Land-based tourism isn't quite in that same shape. All of the high-end resorts, like Peter Island, Little Dix Bay, Bitter End, and others have been heavily damaged and are closed. Staff has been laid-off and they're still mostly in the mode of assessing damage and trying to recover something from insurance companies. Realistically, it will take a while before these luxury properties re-open. Having said that, a handful of small hotels and private villas were less badly damaged and are booking guests. There are many restaurant options and, if you don't mind an even more adventurous than usual driving experience, land-based tourism is an option. There are still boats strewn everywhere and your vacation certainly won't be like it was before the storms, but the people will be friendly and the painkillers will be potent. Again, c'mon down. You'll have fun and you'll be helping the islands recover when we need it the most. And all of you that promised to buy me a beer after Irma and Maria can make good on your promise.

Getting to the BVI isn't too difficult now, but there are fewer flights and ferries on the schedule because there are fewer tourists. I flew through San Juan and I can report the experience is pretty much the same as it was. The San Juan airport has managed to successfully restore their pre-storm levels of inefficiency. Your TSA screening will be every bit as intrusive as it was before. Request the body cavity search. You can thank me later.

Even though we can rebuild structures, perhaps the biggest shame is the loss of all the beautiful big trees. Irma was like a big lawnmower that came down from the sky. With all the rain that followed, the island is ridiculously lush and green now, but with so many limbs broken off, the new growth has come in like a thick, leafy-green fur covering the limbs that remain. The trees look like they they were drawn by Dr. Seuss himself.

I think I mentioned this before, but without the trees blocking views, you can see everything. There are ocean views where there weren't ocean views. You can see

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homes where you never knew there were homes. I can see my neighbors' house and they can see mine. I'm inserting a pause here for dramatic effect... Yes, they can see my pool. And there's nothing I can plant that will restore my privacy in the short term. Perhaps I'll build a wall. Mexico can pay for it.

23rd December 2017

As a post script to yesterday's entry, I'd like to send a big shout-out to Quaker Oats. I am, of course, talking about The Quaker Oats Company of Chicago Illinois, Zip Code 60661.

If you were following my posts after Irma, you'll know they became known as The Oatmeal Diaries. There was no power and, hence, no refrigeration, and Quaker Oats was my go-to breakfast, and sometimes lunch and dinner. Several people contacted Quaker directly immediately after the storms and requested they send oatmeal to the BVI as aid. And they declined. That's right, Quaker, with nearly a half billion dollars in sales, couldn't afford to send a few thousand bucks worth of cereal to our devastated islands. Not only was that an enormous marketing/PR fail, it showed a real lack of corporate social responsibility. They had a unique opportunity to do some good for some people. But they declined. Shame, shame, shame.

So, Quaker is now dead to me. I will eat another brand of oatmeal from this day forth. I'm not sure what other brands of oatmeal are out there, but I'll be eating the Un-Quaker.

6th March 2018

It was six months ago today that Hurricane Irma, the strongest storm ever recorded in the Atlantic basin, hit the Virgin Islands. It was a storm so strong, it actually registered on the Richter scale. You read that right, a hurricane registered on earthquake-detecting seismometers. Not only was it never-before-seen powerful, it was monstrously large. To put it in perspective for my Buckeye friends, Hurricane Irma was larger than the whole state of Ohio.

So, on this six-month anniversary, I thought I'd get Mr. Peabody to fire-up his "way-back" machine and take you down memory lane for a couple paragraphs, then give you a long-winded status report of where things stand. From my humble perspective, of course.

Before Irma, I rarely posted on social media. I was only on Facebook hoping to meet a nice Russian bot, to be honest. But, after Irma, I was lucky enough to have access to an Internet connection at a neighbor's house for a few hours each day, when almost nothing else was working on the island. I tried to present an unfiltered view of what life was like in the BVI since so little information was available to the outside world. I lived on a diet of mostly Quaker oatmeal for weeks after the storm. My Facebook entries became known as "The Oatmeal Diaries" and went viral. Some people who read my posts contacted Quaker and asked if they would send oatmeal to Tortola as aid. And Quaker refused! So, if you're wondering, I am still eating oatmeal. But only the "un-Quaker." The Quaker Oats company, of Chicago, Illinois, Zip Code 60661, is dead to me.

If you haven't read the posts, or you feel like reminiscing, or you've just got waaay too much time on your hands, they were compiled by Jeremy's Kitchen, a local Beef Island restaurant, and are accessible through this link:

<http://www.jeremyskitchen.com/?p=3522>

One of my favorite storm stories never made my blog. Conch Charters, a leading charter company here on Tortola, had a sailboat securely strapped down, in dry

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dock, on West End. Apparently, the straps started popping loose, like Frankenstein freeing himself after the reanimation experiment had given him life. Pop! Pop! Pop! Pop! Pop! And, just like that, the boat helicoptered into the sky, never to be seen again. But, I digress. Back to the update.

Today, we're six months on from hurricane Swirly McWindface and I always get asked lots of questions about which BVI attractions, hotels and restaurants are open. The answer is most of them! The trains still aren't running, but it's pretty incredible how many places have reopened within just six months, considering the scope of the devastation. I find the best resource to find out what's open and what's not, is Chuck Metter's Web site, which usually has the latest status on everything. Chuck put this Website together as a public service. He did a wonderful job and it's incredibly comprehensive. Check it out:

<https://www.bvitraveller.com/>

Charter boat tourism has bounced back much faster than land-based tourism because all of our iconic resorts and luxury properties got so heavily damaged. It will take time to rebuild them. Boats, on the other hand, can move, so charter fleets are gradually being replenished. In fact, there are now lots of nice, shiny new charter boats in the BVI!

I believe all of the high-end resort properties, like Bitter End, Peter Island, and Little Dix Bay, to name three, have now vowed to rebuild, so that's very good news, but they won't be open this season. Lots of restaurants and bars have reopened on almost all the islands in the BVI, so there's a good selection everywhere. Foxy's, the Soggy Dollar, Hendo's, and most places on Jost Van Dyke, have reopened. I understand Hog Heaven, on Virgin Gorda, is close to reopening. Cocomaya, a favorite of mine, reopened quickly. Cooper Island will also reopen soon. On Norman Island, Pirate's Bight was back in business quickly. A replacement for the Willy-T, which is supposed to be a larger copy of the old one, is probably only a month away now. Anegada is pretty much business as usual. So, if you are planning a charter boat vacation this season, nearly everything is up and running again. You'll have many beaches and attractions to yourself and there are plenty of places to provision and great restaurants and bars open

everywhere. If you're "on the fence" about this season, please come and help us out. You'll have a great time.

Most of the sunken and heavily damaged boats were complete write-offs after the twin Cat 5 hurricanes, so insurance settlements generally happened faster for boats than for homes and businesses. While there have now been some payouts to businesses and homeowners, the process remains painfully slow and difficult. Many of us, including myself, are still waiting for an insurance settlement. It's safe to say insurance adjusters aren't on many people's Christmas card lists. But, it does look like there might finally be some light at the end of the tunnel, so color me hopeful. Stressed to the max, but hopeful.

Also, although I know a handful of people who are still without power, I believe everyone has water and almost the entire power grid has been restored, which is HUGE.

On the negative side of the ledger, since I try to present a balanced view, I have to tell you the recovery is spotty.

A lot of places still look, how shall I say it? Rough. A staggering amount of debris has been removed, and Tortola looks a thousand times better than it did on September 7th, but there are still lots of buildings in a state of disrepair and wrecked cars and boats that haven't yet been removed. It's a mixed bag after six months. Some places have been totally repaired and look good. Others are in the middle of the construction process, but a few buildings are still missing roofs and walls and appear abandoned. I'm guessing that most of these places will eventually be repaired, but the owners are waiting on insurance. A few people may not have the money to rebuild. Others may simply not have the energy to deal with the reconstruction hassles. Those people are trying to dump their damaged homes or boats for whatever they can get for the land or salvage value and not have to deal with them. There's opportunity here, for investors looking at long-term potential.

The large majority of rental homes and apartments in the BVI were badly damaged, so there's a massive shortage of decent housing. Sadly, there's not a lot of options from which to choose and many landlords have substantially raised their rents.

If you're in the construction trade, you've got more business than you can handle. In fact, it's almost impossible to find good contractors, roofers and carpenters right now. And, if you are lucky enough to find one, guess what? His price has probably gone up.

Thousands of people left the Virgin Islands after the storms, as businesses closed or temporarily relocated. Hopefully, the small army of lawyers, accountants, and other professionals who were forced to relocate to offices in Cayman, London and elsewhere, return soon. A lot of my friends are gone. I hope they'll come back. I hear the frustration and stress in some of my other friends' voices who are still here and I hope they'll stay.

For most people who have been here throughout, life is a struggle, to be honest. With fewer tourists visiting Tortola and a greatly reduced population in the BVI because many jobs have gone away, it will be hard for some smaller businesses to weather this economic hardship until next year. While many people will come back, others may yet leave because of the daily frustrations and hardship.

I think most people who live here are just frazzled. Getting through the insurance process is stressful and draining. The ports are clogged with what look like hundreds of containers. Our Immigration and Labor processes are overwhelmed. People arrive at the Labor Department, sometimes as early as 2:30am, to get in line and make sure they'll be processed that day. It's madness. Our infrastructure has been stretched beyond its limits. Improvements are being made to systems across the board, but daily life has been a challenge for those trying to rebuild their homes and businesses, hire workers, and bring in supplies. Most people just wish they had their old lives back. We'll all get there, but it can't be done with a snap of the fingers. The only path is to keep pluggin' away, fixing what's broken.

So, that's my report of the Good, the Bad, and the Ugly at the six-month mark. If you're considering coming here as a tourist, don't hesitate. The weather is gorgeous, the water is sublime, the people are friendly, and the Painkillers are cold. You'll have a great time. If you live in the BVI, it's easy to get worn down and see only the problems, but take a view from 50,000 feet. The territory has made miraculous progress in a very short time. There will continue to be bumps in the road (or gigantic potholes, in this case), but the BVI will be back, better than ever.

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The islands have bounced back much faster than I ever believed possible. I, for one, am in for the long haul and I'm going to make my little slice of heaven better than it was before.

Lastly, I want to touch on one more subject. A number of boat and homeowners here have told me they've had their fill with paradise. With rising ocean temperatures, they see more hurricanes in the future for the BVI. They say they're going back to the safety of the States. If you know me well, you know I'm a math guy, so I did a little research. While it's true that ocean temperatures have been rising and that forecasters believe we could experience a larger number of very strong storms in the coming years, you have to look at the probabilities.

According to historical NOAA weather data, the chances of a tropical storm, or worse, hitting the BVI in any year is about 42%. We're actually less likely to be hit than places like Miami (48%) and Cape Hatteras, North Carolina (also 48%). The chances of Miami getting hit in any particular year by a strong hurricane, a Category 3 or above, within 30 miles, are 4%. I'm picking on Miami, but anywhere on the Gulf and Southeast Atlantic coast of the US is vulnerable. Hey – if you want to live on the ocean, this is the price you pay. If you live in Ohio, you get tornados and wintry snowstorms that kill people. In California, you live with the chance of an earthquake. We're all just playing the odds. While statisticians rightly point out the next “thousand year storm” can be this year, the bottom line is that the BVI is actually at lower risk of a major hurricane hit in any given year than is South Florida.

Hurricane Irma was the “perfect storm,” pardon the pun. It was the strongest storm ever recorded in the Atlantic, it happened to hit the BVI when it was at its very peak of destructive power, and it was an absolute direct hit. Tortola was right in the middle of the eye. The chances of all of those events happening again are miniscule – certainly a small fraction of 1%. And, if Irma had passed just a few miles to the North or South – just 10 miles, say – we'd be having a completely different discussion right now.

Actually, we wouldn't be having ANY discussion right now because I never would have written anything on Facebook! I'd just be minding my own business, hoping to meet a nice Russian bot.

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6th June 2018

Today marks the 9-month anniversary of Hurricane Irma – the lawnmower that fell from the sky. I figured it was about time to post another update of life in the BVI for my non-island friends.

Last Friday was the official start of hurricane season in the Caribbean. Oh, joy. While major storms generally don't start appearing until the middle of August (and the riskiest period lasts until about the middle of October), June 1st is the day I start watching the 500 day forecast on The Weather Channel.

A lot has happened in the BVI since my last update, three months ago. I think most people have finally received their insurance settlements, including yours truly, so there's reconstruction activity going on everywhere. Rebuilding continues to be a challenge since our port is still clogged by hundreds of shipping containers and there are still shortages of building materials and construction labor. Since hurricane season is officially upon us, people are racing against time to get their properties storm-ready (again, including yours truly).

More restaurants and businesses have reopened and a few more will be opening over the Summer. Premier resorts like Oil Nut Bay, on Virgin Gorda, and the Cooper Island Beach Club have been open for a while. The most recent government statistics I saw reported 552 total hotel rooms available for bookings in the BVI. This number represents just 16% of our pre-storm capacity, so we've got a long way to go to get back to where we were.

Upscale Guana Island Resort will reopen in July and Necker Island will reopen in the fall. I understand Sebastian's will open next month and the Sugar Mill in October. Little Dix Bay and the Bitter End Yacht Club, to name two others, are expected to reopen in late 2019. If you haven't seen the pictures, Bitter End was absolutely obliterated by Irma, but heavy construction is now underway there, as well as on neighboring Saba Rock. The good news is that most places are rebuilding to be better and stronger than before, so the final tourist product, when everything is done, will be really good.

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While land-based tourism is still kind of a mess, the charter boat business continues to pick up steam. There are lots of shiny new boats at all the anchorages. All the main charter companies, like The Moorings, Marine Max, Sunsail and Horizon are going strong. Anyone planning a charter boat holiday will have a great time. Don't hesitate to come down this Summer and enjoy. The waters are clear and wonderful, there are plenty of great beaches, snorkeling and diving attractions, and nothing's overly crowded. Lots of bars and restaurants have reopened on Jost Van Dyke, Virgin Gorda, Cooper Island, Norman Island and, especially, Anegada. The Willy-T reopened last weekend, but in a new location on Peter Island. I wasn't at the Grand Opening, but I understand the boat is bigger and better than ever. I may have to check it out. For research purposes only, of course.

Hundreds of wrecked boats have been removed by cranes and barges, but there are still many remaining as a reminder of Irma's fury. Of the ones that are still strewn about on shore, some people didn't have insurance and just abandoned their boats and left the territory. Others pocketed the money they received from their insurers and left the wreckage on our beaches or sunk, clogging up our mooring fields. Nice, huh? They just handed over their messes for someone else to clean up. Those people should be shot.

So, while I'm ranting, let me also rant about the people who haven't lifted a finger to clean up their messes. Right after the storm, most people picked up debris and did their best to fix up their homes, within the limits of their savings and the availability of building materials and labor. When most received their insurance settlements, they started replacing roofs and doing other, more expensive repairs. Yet, there are some among us who haven't even touched their properties. You know who you are... Some buildings and yards are in exactly the same state as they were the day after the storm. What are these people waiting for, I ask? Do they think the aid workers will come back? Do they think magical cleaning gnomes will suddenly appear one night? Well, here's a newsflash - the crew from HGTV's "Extreme Makeover" ain't comin'. It's time to step up! All right, rant over.

In a post I made on the six-month anniversary of Irma, I made the argument that being hit by another hurricane of Irma's ferocity, despite the long-term warming of the oceans, is an incredibly unlikely event. Not that "thousand year events" can't

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happen back-to-back, but the odds are a tiny fraction of 1%. Even if Mother Nature brews up another monster, what I think most people don't realize is just how location specific the damage can be. I'll give you two examples:

Friends of mine from the UK spent their Easter break on the island of Antigua. They had never visited Antigua before and couldn't identify much storm damage. A neighboring island to Antigua is Barbuda. The distance between Antigua and Barbuda, an island that was so badly wrecked it was declared uninhabitable and the entire population was evacuated, is just 39 miles. Thirty nine miles was the difference between minimal damage and catastrophic loss.

When the eye of Irma was directly over my house, I walked outside and witnessed total ruin in all directions. Everything was flattened like after a nuclear blast. My home is about 120' above sea level and I saw huge rolling waves, cresting at 50' to 60', smashing the shore below. My first thoughts were of the island of Anegada. While the other islands in the BVI are mountainous, Anegada is flat and low. Its highest point is only about 28 feet above sea level. I remember saying, "Oh, my God. Look at those waves. Anegada must be gone. How could any living thing possibly survive?" Later, we discovered that Anegada escaped with minimal damage – and the businesses there were some of the first that were up and running and ready to welcome tourists. In fact, 10 of the 11 hotels on Anegada are now operational. Anegada is just 16 miles from Beef Island, where I live. Unbelievable.

Despite the massive size and destructive power of Irma, its worst effects were incredibly localized. So, in the vastness of the ocean, even with warming ocean temperatures causing more, larger storms as a long-term trend, the chances of getting hit, dead-center, by another storm like Irma are incredibly small. Could it happen? Could we have a thousand year occurrence twice in two years? Sure, but it's almost lottery odds.

Last hurricane season was a total disaster. And we got no help from the Democrats. They're obstructionists. But I tell you what, I'm going to make my house stronger. It will be the strongest house. And no one does that better than me, believe me. And honestly, if you don't like it... I'm sorry. And quite frankly, if you don't like it, you are just as bad as Crooked Hillary and Lyin' Comey. SAD! It will cost a lot

of money. Many, many billions of dollars. But I will have the best house, I kid you not. It will be unbelievable, it will be so strong.

As for this hurricane season? We'll see what happens, folks. Believe me.

6th September 2018

"If you see an elephant dance, you shouldn't criticize how well it dances. You should marvel that it can dance at all."

Hang with me for a few paragraphs and you'll see where I'm going with this...

I vividly remember how things were one year ago today – the day the BVI was struck by the most powerful Atlantic hurricane to make landfall in recorded history. Many people lost their lives, both during the storm and in the aftermath. Command, control and communications were out. No water. No power. Nearly all the utility poles were down and the roads were a tangle of fallen trees and wires. Cars were tossed around like toys, many upside down or in piles. Thousands of boats were smashed or destroyed. 85% of all structures were heavily damaged or lost their roofs. A quarter of the population was displaced. Dangerous debris, pieces of sharp metal roof sheeting and glass shards were everywhere. Armed prisoners roamed free. Human sacrifice, dogs and cats living together, mass hysteria! Seriously, the BVI looked like it had been obliterated by a nuclear blast.

And now, as I look around the island, it's a totally different place. On this one-year anniversary, I'm sure many people will post stunning before and after pictures of the transformation. Sure, there's still a lot to do, a lot to clean up, and there are problems aplenty. We're not yet the lush tropical paradise we were before the storm, but the landscape is green again with new growth shoots. We have water and the power grid has been restored. Hundreds of wrecked boats have been loaded onto barges and removed. Roads have been repaired. There are shiny new roofs and fresh coats of paint on lots of buildings and there's scaffolding and the buzz of construction on most of the rest. Spotless new ferries are in service and brand spankin' new catamarans bob in the anchorages. A large majority of our

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restaurants, bars and tourist attractions have reopened and are vibrant again. Charter boats that spent last season down-island will be returning to the BVI for this upcoming season. In some ways, the BVI is even BETTER than it was pre-Irma.

Should the government have done some things differently? Should repairs on schools and other key buildings be further along? Should insurance companies have responded better? Are there people who haven't lifted a finger to clean up their messes, maybe hoping someone would do it for them? The answer to all of these questions is, "Yes." I could name names, but I won't do that without an immunity deal from Mueller.

I hear locals and expats grouse about the delays, the shortages, the things Government did or didn't do, the roads, or what-have-you, but I am astonished at how far the BVI has come.

So, to all those in the BVI who are cynical and see only the problems, I say step back and look at the big picture. Remember where we were. And look at where we are today.

We've just seen an elephant dance, my friends.

So, the progress has been impressive, but where are we now, one year on? Well, virtually everyone who went through Irma has lingering symptoms of PTSD, whether they admit it or not. Speaking for myself, my house is now 95% repaired, with only a (long) punch-list of things that still need doing. I think I'm prepared and my home is even stronger, should there be another storm.

@Charlie Bufton is an expat, living on Virgin Gorda, who writes a blog about living in the BVI. She was on VG for Irma and then was evacuated before hurricane Maria hit. A couple days ago, she posted this personal story, which is extremely well written. I think she captures the experiences and feelings of a lot of people. If you have the time, it's definitely worth the read:

<https://thebarefootangel.com/lessons-that-hurricane-irma-t.../>

In his 2018 Budget Address, our Premier provided some sobering statistics about how the storms affected our tourism industry. He reckoned the industry has been set back by five years in some sectors. In 2016, the BVI exceeded the one million visitor mark for the first time in its history, recording increased arrivals by cruise ship, overnight visitors and day-trippers. 2017 showed a 33% decline. That, my friends, is a big hit to an economy. Essentially, hurricanes Irma and Maria took the territory back to 2013 levels.

For the past 40+ years, sailing charters have been the life-blood of the BVI. But Irma damaged close to 90% of the BVI's charter fleet. Probably half of the damaged boats were write-offs. Despite the massive hit, the charter boat industry was quick to get back on its feet. By last January, just about all of the sailing charter companies and brokers were back in business. Available vessels before the hurricanes were about 3,800. By April 1 this year, there were already 1,500 charter boats in service. With much of the inventory destroyed, we probably went through last season at 40-60% capacity.

It's looking like many companies will be back to 100% capacity for the 2019 season, which is pretty remarkable. My friends in the charter boat industry tell me they're seeing very strong demand for December and beyond. Many more boats will be in BVI waters, including new boats and those that spent 2018 in other Caribbean locations. Once we get through the rest of this hurricane season, assuming we don't get a major it, we should be near normal again for the charter boat industry.

Land-based tourism is a different matter. Rebuilding hotels, resorts, and rental villas has been a huge challenge and has moved more slowly. Iconic resorts like Little Dix Bay will take another year before they'll be ready to accept guests. Logistics have been tortuous and there have been constant shortages of materials and labor as we all compete for the same resources.

Speaking of labor shortages, right now in the BVI, if you have carpentry skills, you've got it made! The best carpenters are booked until 2027. And that would be late 2027, at that. I know I've fully funded my carpenter's retirement in Monaco. In fact, after I wrote the check for my last invoice, I understand my carpenter made an offer to Richard Branson to buy Necker Island.

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I'd say most people have completed the most basic repairs to roofs, windows and doors by now, but you can still see a lot of repair work in progress when you drive around Tortola. Even though we're in the middle of hurricane season, many buildings are covered in scaffolding. While it's great that construction seems to be roaring ahead, the downside is that if a strong storm hits, each 2X4 will become a missile. Much of the damage caused by Irma was a result of flying debris. In my own case, my most severe damage was caused by chunks of my neighbor's house flying into mine.

"I want to be an insurance agent when I grow up." Said no one. Ever.

After Irma, our insurance companies were demonized. Like Government officials, they were easy targets for everyone. Too few adjusters were trying to handle too many claims. Oftentimes, settlement negotiations became contentious when adjusters offered just a small fraction of the claim. I've heard, but can't verify, that the average payout was about 60% of the amount claimed. Obviously, if 60% was the average, it means many people settled for far less.

I didn't receive my final settlement offer until late May, or eight months following Irma. Some people I know STILL are waiting on their final settlement. While we all waited for a check to be written, we couldn't plan, because we didn't know how much money we'd receive or, in fact, whether our insurer would go bankrupt and we'd get nothing. Stress levels were through the roof.

Someone once said, "the only difference between insurance agents and bookies is that insurance agents wear better suits." I don't blame the problems on the people who work in our local offices. They tried to do their very best, under exceptionally difficult circumstances. Some of them even put their OWN home repairs on the back-burner in order to put their customers first. Now, the adjusters that were sent – that's a whole different matter. As if things weren't bad enough after the devastation, my adjuster took his sweet time and argued every single line item on my claim. He made a very bad situation even worse. Let's just say he's not on my Christmas card list this year.

So what can be done to ensure the insurance debacle doesn't happen again, if the unthinkable happens? Predicting and solving our future challenges is tougher than a two-dollar steak, but one proposed solution I've heard makes a ton of sense. It's been implemented in Mexico. If it had been in place in the BVI, it would have made a world of difference – at least for me. Basically, any insurer that wants to do business in the BVI would be required pay an advance, immediately after the event, equal to 30% of the reserve amount of the claim. If any of us would have received an advance check like that, we could have ordered materials and quickly started remedial repairs. Stress levels would have been waaaaay lower. And the whole island would be much further along in its readiness now, should a severe storm hit this year.

On that subject, everyone's doing their best but, to be honest, we're not ready for a major storm. The shelters haven't yet been repaired and many people who were uninsured or underinsured are still living in dreadful conditions. A catastrophic storm this season would add years to recovery efforts and would devastate buildings with makeshift repairs. They say "hope isn't a strategy" but we better hope we don't have any sort of hurricane this year – even a mild one.

So far, so good, but anyone who lives in the tropics knows that the weather can change quicker than Elton John at a Liberace tribute. The 2018 Atlantic hurricane season officially began June 1, but we're really in the thick of it now. There have been seven named storms in the Atlantic so far in 2018, with none being devastating, but 90% of hurricane activity happens between August 15th and October 15th. We've still got a long way to go before we're out of the woods.

We can prepare for "normal" hurricanes, but I'm not sure there's much anyone can do to protect against a monster storm like Irma. It was such an outlier from a statistical perspective. For a storm like that, putting up shutters seems almost like asking a Kamikaze pilot to wear a helmet. What's the point? You prepare as best you can and then hope for some luck. The good news is, as I noted in a previous blog entry, the chances of another "thousand year event," like Irma, are lottery odds. And we're no more likely to get a serious storm in the BVI than are people

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who live in Cape Hatteras, Miami, or New Orleans. The BVI is heaven on earth. The odds of a serious storm are tiny. I'll risk it.

I was recently in the States for a couple weeks. With as difficult as this year has been trying to piece everything back together, one would think I would have really enjoyed my time off the rock. Well, I hated it. I couldn't wait to get back to the BVI. With most of my mature trees gone, my neighbor can now look down at my pool from their balcony like a prison guard overseeing inmates the yard. I can't bring the trees back so I'm embracing the new openness and the expansive views!

A long, hard year has passed since Irma, but the BVI is mostly back. It's certainly different but, yes, I think it's even better. And there's no place on earth I'd rather be.

ps If you followed my posts immediately after Irma, you might be wondering about something. Yes, I still eat oatmeal. But it's Bob's Red Mill Scottish Oatmeal now. Not that "other" brand. You know the one. The one that's dead to me.

27th October 2018

I normally don't post much on my timeline, but the seas were super-calm yesterday, so I stopped alongside the road and snapped this photo. I didn't enhance it. BVI's looking pretty good, 10 months after a couple of Cat 5 hurricanes, huh?



1st December 2018

It's December 1st and the 2018 hurricane season is now in the books.
OFFICIALLY over. Finished. Kaput.

So, I thought it might be an appropriate time to update my real and imaginary Facebook friends about progress in the British Virgin Islands.

If you weren't listening to the news, a couple of small storms passed through the BVI a little more than a year ago and lightly damaged a few boats and buildings. Since then, we've all been working hard to tart the place up a bit for tourists. It didn't need much. A little paint, some flowers, a couple of throw pillows.

Anyway, two weeks ago, friends from the UK stayed with me for a few days and I had the opportunity to play tour guide, taking them to all the usual spots I would take first-time visitors to the BVI. It was actually the first time I had visited a lot of these places since before Hurricane Irma. I was shocked at how good everything is looking! I posted a pretty positive status review on the one-year anniversary of Irma, back on September 6th, but things have really come a long way since then. The hillsides are lush and green and the sea is crystal clear. The bars, restaurants and hotels I visited that have reopened are all better than they were pre-storm. There's still a long way to go, mind you, but the BVI is looking great!

Since the hurricanes, our Financial Services industry has faced challenges, but has been pretty stable. Construction is absolutely booming. Many sectors of the tourism industry have bounced back, but it's been spotty. Cruise ships, like Disney and Norwegian, have returned and are a daily sight in the harbor. Like before, passengers are flocking to Cane Garden Bay and taking excursions to places like the Baths and Jost Van Dyke. Charter boat tourism is roaring back, but land-based tourism is still struggling because of a lack of hotel rooms. According to Tourist Board statistics, we're still only at about 30% of the pre-Irma level of hotel and villa room availability. That hurts.

Sir Richard's Necker Island has reopened, which I understand looks amazing. Guana Island has reopened, as well as Scrub Island, but these are smaller resorts.

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I've been to Scrub twice in the past two weeks and it looks like it did pre-Irma. They've done a great job. There's still no timeline on many of the larger properties. Little Dix Bay and Bitter End Yacht Club, on Virgin Gorda, have both announced ambiguous 2019 opening dates. The Sugar Mill is supposed to open yet this year, as well as Yacht Club Costa Smeralda. Saba Rock was originally supposed to open this year, but I understand the damage was discovered to be worse than they anticipated, so that's not going to happen. Peter Island Resort and Spa hasn't announced an opening date and hasn't begun major reconstruction.

But while we're short on places to stay, most of the best restaurants and bars have either already reopened or are reopening within the next few weeks. Brandywine had its grand reopening party last Thursday and looks picture postcard perfect. Bananakeet looks better than it ever did. So, as far as land-based tourism goes, the natural attractions are looking good, the weather's fabulous, and there are great restaurants and bars aplenty. All the ingredients are in place. You just need to find a room!

On a personal note, my house is 95% repaired and, now that things are normalizing, I'm trying to get out and about and become more social again. Last weekend, I was wading in the crystal clear waters at the Soggy Dollar bar, painkiller in hand (as one does), and started chatting with a couple next to me. After a minute, the wife says, "Wait – are you the Chuck who wrote the blog after Irma?" She liked the blog, so I admitted it was me. We chatted the rest of the afternoon (delightful people) and got together again before they returned to the States. So, if we became BFF's or you started following my posts after Irma, and you're coming down to the BVI for a vacation or if you live in the USVI and you're heading over for a day trip, send me a Private Message. I'd love to meet you in the real world! Gratuities are always appreciated. But don't feel any pressure.

6th March 2019

It's the 18 month anniversary of Hurricane Irma, so I thought it was time to update all my real and make-believe friends on the status of the BVI.

If I join Mr. Peabody and Sherman in the WayBack Machine and travel back to September 6th, 2017, the "thousand year event" had left the BVI looking like a post-nuclear apocalyptic wasteland. They all said the BVI was finished. Over.

Well, nothing's over until we say it is! Was it over when the Germans Bombed Pearl Harbor? No! It wasn't over then and it's not over now!

That's right – 18 months on and the BVI is rockin', my friends. Charter boat tourism seems nearly back to where it was pre-storms. My favorite restaurants and beach bars have reopened – all better than ever. Giga-yachts crisscross past my house (but never share their Gray Poupon). Cruise ships steam in at dawn; cruise ships steam out at dusk.

According to a recent Forbes article, after losing more than 90% of its accommodations from the hurricanes a year-and-a-half ago, about 75% of the territory's marine berths were restored for this season (again, it SEEMS like more than that) but only 37% of land accommodation inventory has reopened.

So the BVI is still a work in progress. On the marine side, about 3,000 boats were destroyed by the twin hurricanes and if you're visiting now, you'll still see boats on their side, washed up on shore, upside down in a marina, or partially sunk. I don't have a current count, but I'm guessing there are still at least a hundred wrecked vessels that need to be removed, scattered around the territory. The ones that remain are typically either harder to remove or they've been abandoned and there are legal processes that must be played out. I continue to see wrecked boats being loaded onto barges by cranes and taken away as the marine cleanup process continues, but draws to a close.

With only 37% of land-based accommodations having reopened, rooms can be scarce. Several of our signature properties are still at least a year away from reopening (e.g. Little Dix Bay, Peter Island, and the Bitter End Yacht Club, to

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name three), but a lot of people put in Herculean efforts to get their businesses rebuilt before this past holiday season. Since December, the pace of construction has slowed, but a few more places are opening each month, like more businesses at Soper's Hole, for example. Many villas and small resorts that used to cater to tourists are now being rented long-term because of the housing shortage. The bottom line is that accommodations can be hard to find, but if you find a suitable place to stay, the BVI is back and you'll have a blast.

If you're planning a trip, the BVI Traveller Website usually has the most up-to-date information on what's back and what's not:

<https://www.bvitraveller.com/news/>

Everybody talks about how the tourism sector has rebuilt, but what about repairs to homes and apartments? I would say things are mixed. If you drive around the BVI, you'll see a stark difference between those with the means to fix their places back up and those who were either underinsured or completely uninsured. To be honest, there's a whole group of people who are still struggling. There are also a few people who have the money, but haven't yet cleaned up their properties. Shame on you – and you know who you are.

If you visit, tip a little more than you would back home. People in the BVI have been through a lot. You won't miss a couple extra dollars, given to a server or taxi driver, but it will mean the world to people who are trying to get back on their feet.

Also, people rarely talk about how Mother Nature has responded to the disaster. It's been interesting. Immediately after the storm, it seemed nearly all the mature trees in the BVI were destroyed or were badly damaged and misshapen. If a tree was spared, there wasn't a leaf to be found. Bark was even stripped from trees in some cases. Everything looked brown and lifeless, as far as the eye could see.

On this barren, brown canvas, one of my most vivid memories from the aftermath of the storm was seeing broken furniture, belongings and pieces of what was once a house, arranged by the wind as a vertical stripe up or down a hillside. Within a couple of months, most of the accessible debris was cleaned up, but a lot of the inaccessible stuff will be on the hillsides for centuries. Nobody can get to it and

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plastic can take a thousand years to decompose. If you look at the green hillsides now, you don't see any of this debris. It's hidden under vines and new green growth. But it's there.

One of the things that makes me saddest is that a lot of our beautiful, mature trees are gone. Structures can be repaired, but it will take decades for young trees to get that big again. Many of our mangroves are dead, as well, and they will also take decades to come back. So, if you look at the landscape now, you'll see the green shoots of new growth everywhere. Fast growing species spread like wildfire. It's different and looks beautiful, but it's a beauty of rebirth.

Speaking of rebirth, the BVI now has a new government in-place as of just over a week ago. After a devastating blow, I think the BVI has roared back and, in many ways, is better than ever. I'm amazed at the progress. But it was the private sector that led this rise from the ashes. The public sector has lagged and many critical infrastructure programs need to be addressed. The new government faces formidable challenges on multiple fronts. I wish them Godspeed. But at least we're not fighting over a wall, are we?

By the way, it's getting harder to write these hurricane updates. I have a crack writing staff, but they're running out of fresh material. It's like I'm in Season 5.

1st June 2019

Since it's June 1 and the official start of the 2019 hurricane season, I thought another entry in my Facebook "post hurricane Irma" blog was appropriate.

The long break since my last entry has allowed me free time to get to know all my bodyguards on a personal level, which was really overdue. I furloughed my entire comedy writing staff after Irma so I'm writing this one myself. I certainly didn't want my writers to kill me off in the finale like a Targaryen.

So, on with the update. If you live in the tropics, you know the Atlantic hurricane season officially extends from June 1 to November 30 each year, but most storms

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don't really kick up until August. As a rule of thumb, 80% of tropical storm activity happens during the month of September and 90% happens in the 60 days between August 15th and October 15th. The worst weather is usually pretty concentrated.

For 2019, The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) is predicting a "near-normal" hurricane season with 9 to 15 named tropical storms, of which 4 to 8 could become hurricanes, including 2 to 4 major hurricanes (category 3, 4 or 5). Of course, all it takes is one direct hit to ruin your day.

Speaking of direct hits, in a post I made on the six-month anniversary of Irma, I made the argument that being hit by another hurricane of Irma's ferocity is an incredibly unlikely event. Despite Irma's massive size and destructive power, its worst effects were hyper-localized, near the eye wall. Antigua and Barbuda are neighboring islands in the Caribbean that were both affected by Irma. The distance between them is just 39 miles. Antigua was hardly damaged but Barbuda was so badly wrecked it was declared uninhabitable and the entire population was evacuated. Thirty nine miles was the difference between minimal damage and catastrophic loss. In the BVI, Anegada is just 16 miles from Beef Island, where I live. Anegada escaped with little damage and Beef Island was pretty much wiped clean. Sixteen miles was the difference. So, in the vastness of the Atlantic, the chances of getting hit, dead-center, by another storm like Irma are lottery-type odds. That's my story and I'm sticking to it.

It's been more than a year and a half since the hurricanes and, given the level of devastation (85% of structures and 3,000 boats were heavily damaged or destroyed), the territory has bounced back in a miraculous way.

That's not to say we're completely back to pre-Irma norms, of course. As you drive around the BVI, you still see some buildings without roofs that either haven't been touched yet or where the repairs are still in progress. Nevertheless, things are massively better than they were a year ago. Of the 3,000 boats that were badly damaged or sunk, the large majority have been removed. And there's finally good news on the rest! Last week, a plan was announced for the removal of the remaining 204. Work on that is supposed to commence in September so, hopefully, the BVI will be looking a bit tidier for next tourist season. The area with the most

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wrecks, Beef Island, has 39. Since I live on Beef Island, I'm especially thankful they'll finally be gone.

Most of our signature resorts remain closed, which means the territory still doesn't have a lot of hotel room inventory, but a few more will be opening for the 2019-2020 season. I understand Saba Rock will be reopening, as well as the first phase of the Bitter End Yacht Club. Little Dix Bay is also supposed to reopen for the 2019-2020 season, as well as a few others. There's no real progress yet on Peter Island.

The restaurants and bars that HAVE reopened are better than they've ever been – and some have reported their best months EVER this season, despite overall visitor numbers being down. So, I'd say the best way to characterize BVI tourism this year is “spotty.” Charter boat tourism is going strong again but, until we get more resorts and villas back online, land-based tourism is still suffering. The BVI has a huge event coming up in the next couple of weeks. An internationally known Grammy winning dancehall artist will be performing and up to 8,000 people are expected to visit. But we don't have hotel room inventory - Where will everyone stay?

While most buildings have been repaired and businesses have reopened, I think everyone who went through hurricane Irma still carries some emotional scars, even after more than a year and a half. It's not something that's openly talked about much, but nearly everyone I know has told me privately that they suffer some symptoms of PTSD. After the hurricane, coping with the combined stresses of depleted savings, loss of income, battling with insurance companies, repairing homes and generally rebuilding lives... Honestly, it's been difficult for pretty much everybody. The scars are healing, but it's going to take a while longer for most people to completely bounce back.

Even though today marks the official start of hurricane season, if you don't live in the BVI and you're on the fence about a trip, I'd urge you to visit. The weather usually stays amazing during June and July so you've got a good two months to enjoy a nice holiday here. Our tourist season extends to early August. Around that time, the bars and restaurants start closing up, boats get moved to other locations or taken out of the water, and people start shuttering up their homes and businesses.

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Getting to the BVI is still a little harder than it was pre-storms, but I haven't heard one tourist who's visited this season who hasn't raved about their experience. Bear in mind there's still no restaurant at the St. Thomas airport and, if your layover is in San Juan, your restaurant options include Squirrel Fil-A, Tavern on the Gangrene and El Pollo Salmonello, so bring a pack of jerky.

Given global warming and the start of another hurricane season, I could be concerned. But taking everything into account, I understand there's only a 20% chance of a hellish apocalypse for all mankind forecast this year, so I'm feeling pretty good about things, in general.

6th September 2019

Chuck did not write a post about Irma's 2 year anniversary; life must be back to normal.. Ed.



Photo of Chuck's house Feb 2019

Jeremy's Kitchen would like to thank Chuck for allowing us to compile and curate this wonderful record of the BVI's darkest hour. While there is still much work to do, the BVI is certainly recovered with many places looking better than they ever have.

Alexander Wright. November 2019