Florida gets hit by hurricanes, but who could have predicted we’d have four within six weeks this year? The city of Lake Wales in Polk County has the distinction of being the geographical center of the Florida peninsula. It also marks the spot where the paths of Hurricanes Charley and Frances crisscrossed the state this year within three weeks of each other. That’s the kind of déjà vu nobody needs.

After the first two knockout blows, Hurricane Ivan and Hurricane Jeanne kept everyone on pins and needles until they landed their own left hooks and scored two more major blows to Florida. Even areas not affected by wind damage were impacted by large amounts of rainfall from the storms. As those systems moved inland they spawned hundreds of tornadoes and flooding in states up and down the eastern half of the United States. While Florida was grabbing headlines as the point of landfall, many other states were being devastated by flooding from the slow-moving storms. There’s enough misery to share for everyone east of the Mississippi.

Several lessons have been learned or relearned:

- Native trees fared better in the storms than imported specimen trees.
- Beach erosion is a natural process. Living on barrier islands is a gamble.
- Shortcuts in construction lead to lots of structural damage.
- Trees and power lines do not make good neighbors.
- A house sitting in a grove of trees is a sitting duck.
- Waterfront and low-lying property is prone to flooding.
- People should learn to be more self-sufficient instead of depending on the government.
- Florida would never have been developed if not for air conditioning.

Debris cleanup has become a cottage industry. I saw dozens of trucks from other states parked at motels because the county doesn’t have enough manpower or vehicles to get the job done. It took more than a month before the piles of debris along our street were picked up, and they’re still far from finished.

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