

The essay below was written by Eden Kinkaid, a CFI Intern.

It has been fascinating to watch our community move through the crisis brought about by July's particularly wild storms. I remember stepping outside of my house on the city's westside shortly after the sky had cleared to find good number of my neighbors out in the street talking with a bit of anxiousness, but in good spirits. Everyone was sharing their storm stories – where they were when it hit, how they thought the tree out front was surely coming down, how the lights flickered twice before going out – but also talking about how they could support one another in the days to come. My neighbor and I teamed up and scoured the town for ice on our way home from the market the next morning. I remember walking to the Westside Community Gardens talking to some friends about what a cool thing it was that the simple act of a storm brought people out like this. Before the power returned the next day around noon, we were blessed with a brief respite from modern life.

Needless to say, the experience was not so romantic for some. Throughout the week, I heard story after story from those who still did not have power and were trying to figure out how to go about their everyday lives. One woman, K., who works in the office of my college, shared her experience with me when I walked in to make an appointment. She voiced concerns about not being prepared for such a relatively small crisis in the scheme of possible crises. Her power was out for 9 days, though it only took a few days before a sense of food and water scarcity made her really question the stability of our lifestyles. For her, that week was a lesson not to be forgotten. She worried that the community would just get on with things as we always had. She vowed to be prepared next time.

I really appreciated hearing these stories. For one, I believe that people have a fundamental need to share stories about their experience and be heard, especially in cases like these where a daunting and unexpected challenge is surmounted. I was glad to be a listener. But I also noticed something much more subtle. I was not only listening to these stories and offering my condolences, but being a co-creator in the conversation. We were building something here; the storm stories opened up a dialogue about our community, our fears, and our visions for the future.

I often find it hard to talk to people about sustainability. Being one of the only things I seem to talk about, I've had to meditate on how to talk to people about such a monumental subject. I really felt my conversation with K. bridged this difficulty; we were, somewhat unexpectedly, speaking the same language. K. stated very seriously, "I never knew what food security meant. Now I understand." There was a subtle profundity to this statement, a feeling that real awareness was born. What an amazing opportunity, in the midst of this deep and challenging learning, to have a community dialogue about our journey toward self-sufficiency and sustainability.



These past few weeks can also serve as a meditation on learning to see opportunity in crisis. For me, this opportunity was to connect with people about my passions and projects: seed saving, urban gardening, sustainability. As much suffering and grief as events like these cause, we can practice seeing them in another light. We are presented, in these hard times, the opportunity to approach a crisis as a catalyst for change. Perhaps now that we have emerged from this crisis, our community's shared vision for an independent and sustainability food system (and all that brings with it) will resonate within us with a newly gained sense of clarity, urgency, and perspective.