

# Night of and Wind Water

***Editor's Note:** The following harrowing tale originally appeared in *Hurricane Hugo - The Storm of the Century*. For more survival tales about this powerful 1989 storm, visit the digital version of the magazine at [www.HugoMagazine.com](http://www.HugoMagazine.com).*

“I would like to have been somewhere where I could have seen it,” said a Lowcountry resident who lost everything to Hugo.

It’s a reaction shared by many. As the fiercest storm in modern history made landfall on the Isle of Palms, two young Medical University of South Carolina students were there and lived to tell about it.

The point in time most vivid to Michael A. Pulliam was acceptance of the belief that he would die. He and friend Kevin Williams were swept from the second floor of a house on front beach and were propelled through 12-foot white water currents for a city block, landing on the roof of a one-story house. Sense of time was suspended, he said; the water, the wind and ink-black darkness were his only perceptions.

Their experience with Hugo began calmly on Wednesday night as the two headed for the island to board up Pulliam’s family beach house at 2910 Palm Blvd. The young men went with the intention of remaining there during the hurricane.

“It was half crazy, I guess,” Pulliam said. “But I really like the outdoors in bad weather. We didn’t want it (Hugo) to hit, but we were excited about the onslaught.”

With no radio and a television that didn’t work, they were unaware that by 6 p.m. on Thursday, the storm was upgraded to Category 4, with winds of 135 mph predicted.

“We weren’t concerned at first,” Pulliam said, “because the winds were only 70 to 80 mph. But we had no television. If we had known the storm was upgraded, we’d have left.”

The two were in touch by phone with parents and friends in Columbia. Pulliam’s mother called the Isle of Palms Police Department to report the presence of the two on the island,

Pulliam said.

His grandfather called to instruct them to leave the two-story brick house, and go to the house next door, which was on stilts: “My grandfather was worried about the 12- to 18-foot tidal surge predicted. He didn’t think the house would stand.

There was nowhere for the water to go.”

They left at 8:30, when the power went out.

“We gathered the candles and went next door,” to the house owned by Othniel Wienges of St. Matthews. “It was very, very dark.”

By 9 p.m., Hugo began to flex its muscles.

“The house started to shake and glass began to break upstairs,” said Pulliam.

They found a weather radio and learned that, incredibly, the storm was not predicted to make landfall for another three hours: “We realized then we were in for quite a ride.”

In the hours to come, said Pulliam, “the water became the most terrifying thing of all.” In less than an hour, the water had risen by 15 feet to seep into air conditioning ducts in their second-floor refuge. The floor’s

