

# THE TATTOO

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## Wilma's fierce winds whack Florida

By ERIC SIMMONS  
The Tattoo

The evening before Hurricane Wilma struck Florida late last month, someone spray painted "Wilma, Go Back to Bedrock" on a storefront window in Port St. Lucie.

After direct hits last year from hurricanes Frances and Jeanne and two near misses, Florida's Treasure Coast was not looking for another major storm.

Packing winds of up to 100 miles an hour when it rolled ashore, streets quickly flooded.

"The storm was very intense, I am grateful that my

home did not sustain much damage and my family stayed safe through the storm," said Vivian Serrano, 31, of Port St. Lucie.

With her husband and three children, she weathered the storm at the Spring Hill Suites Marriott where she works.

"I feel for my family and friends in Broward County who were not so lucky," she said.

Palm Beach, Broward, and Miami-Dade counties just south of the area sustained much more damage than the Treasure Coast. The eye passed directly over West Palm Beach with sustained winds over 110

miles per hour, weather experts said.

Serrano said the close call was bad enough.

"The west side of the hotel" where she works "sustained a lot of damage," Serrano said. "And keeping up with trying to keep the water out of the rooms, and moving guests to safety, became exhausting."

Florida Power and Light said after the storm hit that 95 percent of Saint Lucie County had no power. It said that electricity would not be fully

restored until Nov. 15.

Wilma was an unusual hurricane as it left 60-degree weather and a beautiful sunset in its wake.

Enjoying the change, 19-year-old Nicole Kilpatrick of Port St. Lucie said, "I love this weather."

The cooler weather is a relief for the entire area after it experienced one of the hottest summers on record.

With hurricane season not over until Nov. 30, Florida can't breathe easy yet. It may have to brace itself for the next one.

Eric Simmons / The Tattoo

A car on a Port St. Lucie, Fla. street during Hurricane Wilma.



## Diwali, Hindu festival of lights, brings joy

By NIKITA MODI  
The Tattoo

Hindus all across the globe wait anxiously each year for Diwali, the festival of lights that marks the victory of good over evil.

We celebrate it with much fanfare and grandeur, as Diwali, even in modern times, reflects the glories of Indian culture.



Nikita Modi / The Tattoo

Colorful rangoli designs are drawn on the floor in front of a temple in my Indian home during Diwali to welcome the goddess.

Preparations for the holiday start well in advance, with the cleaning and renovating of the entire house. People shop for clothes and jewelry, sending retailers sales of those items soaring.

But sweets are even more in demand. During Diwali, the sales of sweets skyrockets. It is mandatory for people to go to their relatives' houses with sweets on this special day.

Sweetshops remain open until midnight. People do not mind spending a few bucks and indulging in these sweet sins!

Diwali celebrations are spread over five days. The first day is called Dhanteras ('Dhan' means wealth; 'teras' means day.) On this day my house is decorated with colorful designs called rangoli, which are drawn on the floor of the entrance to the house or the temple within the house to welcome the goddess.

Small footprints of Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth, are drawn using rice powder and colored vermilion powder. We light the house with tiny light bulbs and oil lamps.

On this auspicious day, my parents go shopping for gold and silver items. Although it is not compulsory, we believe it adds to your wealth.

On the second day, we take a traditional oil bath before sunrise and apply a beautiful-smelling paste made of herbs called "ubtan" all over our body instead of soap.



Nikita Modi / The Tattoo

The idol of Ganesha and Goddess Lakshmi (the Goddess of Wealth), and oil lamps called diyas are encircling them.

In Bengal, we worship Kali, the goddess of strength, on this day. Lovingly decorated pandals, which are huge bamboo shelters for idols, are found in every nook and cranny of the city for Goddess Kali.

On the third day, which is the most important one, a big ritual called "Lakshmi Puja" is performed after sunset to honor Hindu gods and goddesses - in this case, Goddess Lakshmi.

Custom dictates that we leave the gates

and windows open at that time to welcome Goddess Lakshmi into the house.

After enjoying a sumptuous meal comes the most important part: exploding firecrackers. Everyone, from six to 60, explodes them with fervor.

Hindus believe that Lord Rama returned from his 14-year exile at night, so in order to celebrate his homecoming, his countrymen illuminated their houses with oil lamps and burned firecrackers. So, it is considered important for us to do the same.

On the fourth day, the elders of the family go to their relatives' homes and wish them luck and prosperity.

On the fifth and final day, all sisters treat their brothers to show the love they share.

It's considered a lucky time for gamblers, too. Hindus say the Goddess Parvati played dice with her husband Lord Shiva on this day and she granted that those who gambled on Diwali would prosper in the following year.

During these three days, my family performs all the rituals together.

We play traditional card games and we eat dinner together - all of which generates love between family members.

Diwali is the time when Hindu youth realize the importance of family and our centuries-old traditions and customs - and have fun at the same time.

## When death strikes a boy of 16

By ZACH BROKENROPE  
The Tattoo

Friday, 1 a.m.

It's 1 a.m. and I'm running down the street. The night is silent and crisp, and only the sound of my breathing and the crunch of leaves beneath my Doc Martens fills the air. Sweat rolls in streams from my temple and into my eyes, even though it's October and freezing outside. My side aches and I can't run anymore, so I stop at a corner, sit down on the sidewalk and pull my legs to my chest.

I don't want to go home. I can't go home.

A gust of wind rushes through; an October wind, painful and cruel. The tree branches sway and a group of leaves move and dance in a circle with the wind nearby. I tilt my head upwards to the stars, to God, maybe to no one.

"Sixteen," I say somberly. "He was 16, damn it!"

I want a reason, an answer to the question I haven't asked.

Half an hour before, Tanner Salmon died.

I won't lie and say we were great friends, because in truth, we weren't. We were friends of coincidence, by pure chance. We hung out in the same spots, shared friends and occasionally went to Wal-Mart together - a Midwestern rite of passage.

It was an asthma attack, sudden and massive. But at 12:30 on Friday morning we didn't know that, and the news of his death crept through his body of friends like a gallon of invasive and toxic blood.

Suzu's dad is their family's pastor, and as Tanner was rushed to the hospital, he quickly followed.

We sat in Suzu's family room: her, Eric and I, waiting for the news we didn't hope to hear. Time seemed to suspend, and we could feel and hear our hearts beats inside our chests.

Half an hour later, we heard the car pull up into the gravel driveway and Suzu bolted for the front door as Eric and I followed. The door opened and for a second Monty Nelson was silhouetted in the dark hallway. He moved closer and put his arms around Suzu.

"I'm sorry," he said deeply. "But he didn't make it."

Eric moved first, and leaned against the wall as I fell on the couch.

It's amazing how in an instant everyone in a room can become com-

pletely uncomfortable with other people being there.

"Um," Eric mumbled, "I better go." "Yeah, same here," I said, and grabbed my bag.

Suzu walked us to the porch and for an instant we stood in awkward silence.

"Later," I said, and started walking. Eric got into his car and squealed off into the opposite direction.

I'm sitting on the sidewalk and tears are rolling down my face, freezing on my cheek. I sit for a few more minutes and finally, I stand. I'm out past city curfew already, and my parents will be pissed if I'm late.

I pull my hoodie tight, and walk into the night.

Friday, 9 p.m.

"Damn, it's cold," Ben says and pulls his coat close to his body. He knocks his skateboard upright with his foot and skates to the edge of the corner, crashes, and for a second lies sprawled out in the street.

Mel laughs and pushes the hair out of her eyes. It's nice to hear her laugh; she's cried too much today.

In her right hand she clutches a picture of her and Tanner, sitting on a bench right before homecoming in her freshman year. She looks happy, and he looks kind of smug as he rests his arm around her shoulder. He was her first love, and even though their relationship didn't last, she still held a special place in her heart for him.

"How ya doin'?" I ask her as we stand on the corner of 12<sup>th</sup> Street, the theater marquee lighting the crystal night along with the flickering street light.

Scott, Ben and Ryan skate fiercely around us. When they crash they don't mind the bruises and blood. They enjoy the pain, they relish it.

"Fine," she says meekly. Her eyes are bloodshot and traces of tears are dried to her cheek. I pat her on the back softly. I don't really know what to do.

Scott crashes his board and throws it down hard.

He's taking it the worst out of all of us. While some of us deal with the pain through starvation or silence, Scott seems to self-destruct. We've been here before, and with Scott you just have to wait for him to hit bottom because nothing can help him. The Prozac, the therapy, they deaden him, but they don't take away the pain.

Scott grabs his skateboard and

storms off. A few minutes later, we hear the screech of tires and know he won't be back for awhile.

"We're going to Grand Island to see a movie and go to Wal-Mart. Wanna come?" Ben asks, still breathing hard.

"Thank God," I think. The entire day the city has sunk into a depression. When you live in a city of 4,000 and someone dies young, everyone knows, and everyone is affected.

"Yeah, I'll come," I tell Ben. It'll be an excuse to get out of here, to feel real again. Ten minutes later a dozen of us are packed into three cars and we hit the road. Aurora and Tanner briefly move to the back of our minds.

I wonder if it's okay to feel this sad, to grieve this much. I want to know if I'm being overly dramatic, or if I don't seem like I care enough. I want to know if this is real, or if I'm just imagining it. I want to come into a room and not see someone crying and start to cry myself. I feel numb and tired, and on the way to Grand Island, I fall asleep in the car.



Saturday, 1 a.m.

"I dig the grave tomorrow," Chris says from the back seat of Ben's car. We're on the highway driving back to Aurora when Chris interrupts the silence.

"What?" Ben asks, and looks back at Chris, even though he's driving. I turn down the stereo.

"I'm digging Tanner's grave tomorrow morning. I asked to do it."

Chris's dad is the city's cemetery caretaker, and for the past two years Chris has worked part-time digging graves.

"Are you sure?" I ask.

"Yeah, it's a great honor to me," he says.

After this we don't speak, and I turn up the music.

True to his word, the next morning,

Chris digs Tanner's grave.

Saturday, 7:45 a.m.

The alarm clock beeps and I open my eyes. Sunlight shines through the opening in my curtain and fills the room with light, and through the cracked window I can hear dogs barking outside.

I only went to sleep at four, crashing on my bed as soon as I got home. My clothes stink and hang limply on my body and my neck hurts from lying sideways on the bed.

I don't want to go to work, but I get up anyway and put my clothing on. There's no time for a shower.

Ten minutes later, I walk into McDonalds and my eyes burn and limbs ache.

"Did you hear about Tanner Solomon?" says Christina, who I often refer to as Stupid Oaf, as I start to walk past the grill area in the back.

"His name was Salmon," I say and turn to her.

"Whatever," she answers dismissively. "It's really too bad he did something like that."

I look at her, dismayed.

"What do you mean? What did he do?"

"Oh, you didn't know," she says. "He died this weekend of an alcohol overdose."

I flare with anger.

"Don't say another word," I yell and point at her through gritted teeth. "You don't know what you're talking about and if you say one more word about Tanner I'll walk out of here right now. I swear to God I will."

My manager, Debbie, hears this and moves between us.

"Christina, be quiet! You constantly cause problems and I'm not gonna hear it anymore," she says. "If you say another word, you'll be outta here."

Debbie pats me on the back, and leaves the grill.

"Hey," Christina says, "I'm sorry."

"Screw your apologies," I say as I walk to the back and hang up my coat.

Every time something happens in this town people do this - they create their own stories, their own truths, and spread them around.

I really hate it, I really do. I hate the people. I hate this town. I hate Christina.

The entire day we work side by side, but Christina doesn't dare look me in the eye.