

Traumas can lead to spiritual growth

By JOSHUA NORMAN
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For decades, negative reactions to traumatic events have been the focus of countless articles, studies and stories, Hurricane Katrina being no exception. The negative focus on disasters and trauma is so prevalent that by now nearly everyone has probably heard the phrase "Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder."

There is, however, a flip side to trauma that mental health professionals only recently have begun to take a closer look at. It is called Post-Traumatic Growth, which is a fancy way of spinning an old cliché: "That which does not kill you makes you stronger."

Richard Tedeschi, a psychologist at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, was one of the first in his field to ever use the phrase in a 1995 book he wrote with a colleague on the subject.

"We coined the term Post-Traumatic Growth to sort of encompass all the different things we found in literature about this," Tedeschi said in a phone interview last week. "The concept is really just ancient. If you look at writings in religion, in philosophy from centuries past you find these kind of concepts that suffering can lead to something positive. You can find this in biblical literature. Psychologists are late to the party."

There are five main areas of personal growth that people talk about after traumatic events, Tedeschi said. They are spiritual growth, improved sense of self, enhanced relationships, a general appreciation of the value of life and being set on a positive new life course or new life path.

Spiritual leaders have long used events like Katrina and the Iraq war to foster personal growth, and people like Eddie Moore of Pascagoula have



KARI GOODNOUGH/SUN HERALD

Eddie and Shirley Moore hold a photograph of their son, Willie, a Marine who suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder. On Jan. 21, the 23-year-old Iraq veteran took his own life before he could receive treatment. Despite the pain caused by their son's suicide, Eddie Moore is trying to use the traumatic experience to better himself and help others.

embraced that growth in spite of their pain.

Moore's son, Willy James Moore, came back from Iraq to Pascagoula following his second tour with the Marine Corps less than a month after Hurricane Katrina. The Moore family house had flooded during the storm, and Willy James Moore was struggling with getting treatment for what seemed to be PTSD.

On Jan. 21, the 23-year-old reservist and armored personnel carrier driver took his own life before he could receive treatment.

The pain Moore and his wife, Shirley, have experienced is profound, but Moore

said recently he is trying to better himself and help others in spite of it.

Life's pain, even though it seems destructive, is actually part of life," said Moore, adding that he is planning on setting up meetings at his church to help others suffering like him. "One of my favorite (biblical) books is the book of Job."

It is arguable that Post-Traumatic Growth is a central theme to the book of Job, and it is a tale that is highly regarded by Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

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