

Nearly two thirds of Americans* live in areas protected by the Army Corps of Engineers. This is what happens when that protection fails.

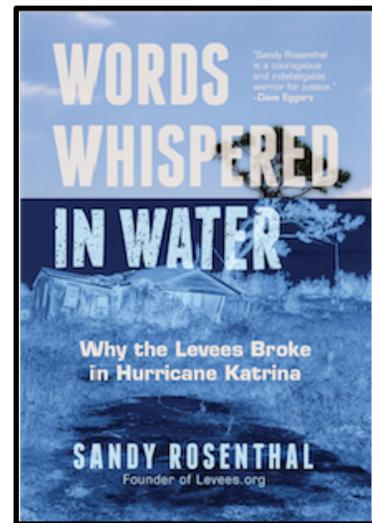
Words Whispered in Water: Why the Levees Broke in Hurricane Katrina by Sandy Rosenthal, founder of Levees.org Mango Publishing, ISBN 978-1642503272, \$19.95

"[R]eveals what it takes to hold the powerful to account."
– [Publishers Weekly](#)

Amazon #1 Best Seller
in Groundwater & Flood Control

Award-Winning Book Cover!

"There are only a few civilians that fight like warriors.
Sandy Rosenthal is one of them."
– **Russel L. Honore'**, LTG United States Army (Ret.)



Words Whispered in Water is the riveting account of citizen investigator and activist **Sandy Rosenthal** as she battles the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers after defective flood walls broke during Hurricane Katrina, inundating New Orleans and resulting in over 1,500 deaths and billions of dollars worth of damage.

Against incredible odds, facing continuous harassment and deception, Rosenthal turns every defeat into victory.

There are secret plots, subterfuge and scandals! The Corps first ignores Rosenthal, then they hire a public relations firm to infiltrate her grassroots citizen group, **Levees.org**, and attack her.

The unbreakable activist pursues every scrap of evidence in dozens of reports and studies about the floodwall failures. *Ten years* after the breaches, Rosenthal and her team successfully corrected the record, getting *The New York Times* to run a major story on how everyone, including the Army Corps of Engineers, *got the Katrina story wrong*, and how the Corps spent millions to attack the activist who insisted they set the record straight.



About the Author

Sandy Rosenthal is the Founder of Levees.org, an organization formed in the wake of the 2005 flooding of New Orleans with the goal of setting the record straight about the Army Corps of Engineer's role in the failure of the city's levees. She earned her MBA at Tulane University and her undergraduate degree at Mount Holyoke, which recently recognized her as one of 76 distinguished alum.

* *Sandy Rosenthal* [broke this story](#) in August 2020!

Recent Media Coverage

- ❖ [Heavily featured](#) in FLOODLINES, a podcast named Best of 2020 by *New York Times*, *NPR*, *Economist*, the *Guardian*, *Vanity Fair* and more. Dec 2020.
- ❖ Featured [Op-Ed](#) in New Orleans Lens on proposed legislation. Dec 14, 2020
- ❖ [Interviewed](#) by NPR's John Burnett with the Miami Book Fair. Nov 21, 2020.
- ❖ [Reviewed](#) by *Publishers Weekly*, Oct. 30, 2020.
- ❖ Featured [guest](#), NDT-TV in New York City on Hurricane Laura. Oct 9, 2020.
- ❖ [Guest](#) on Marc Bernier's radio show in Florida about her book. Oct 7, 2020.
- ❖ [Featured panelist](#) with Walter Isaacson, Tulane University. Sep 14, 2020.
- ❖ [Guest Speaker](#), Louisiana State Museum on her new book. Sept 10, 2020.
- ❖ [Featured](#) on NPR's Weekend Edition about the 15th anniversary of Hurricane Katrina. Aug 29, 2020.
- ❖ [Interviewed](#) by Malik Mingo on Great Day Louisiana TV show. Aug 28, 2020.
- ❖ [Featured](#) on NPR. The 1A show on Hurricane Katrina. Aug 27, 2020.
- ❖ [Highlighted](#) in national Katrina coverage for her activist work. Aug 18, 2020.
- ❖ [Featured](#) by The Advocate in New Orleans for her role obtaining data from FEMA: two-thirds of Americans live in counties with levees. Aug 11, 2020.
- ❖ [Interviewed](#) on WWL-TV in New Orleans discussing her book. July 23, 2020.
- ❖ [Featured](#) on NTD-TV News in New York City commenting on the recent dam failures in Michigan that affected 11,000 people. July 14, 2020.

What They're Saying about Sandy Rosenthal + *Words Whispered in Water*

"[A] blow-by-blow account of [the] fight to hold the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers accountable for the flooding of New Orleans...." -- Publishers Weekly

"There are only a few civilians that fight like warriors. Sandy Rosenthal is one of them."

– Russel L. Honore', LTG United States Army (Ret.)

"Sandy Rosenthal is a courageous and indefatigable warrior for justice."

-- Dave Eggers, author of *The Circle*

"Sandy[Rosenthal] has fought for her city, and her community, harder than most soldiers fight in war."

-- Harry Shearer, actor, producer and voice of *The Simpsons*

"For years Sandy Rosenthal has been the go-to source for any reporter seeking to understand the truth about flood protection in New Orleans.... Read the inside story for yourself in this readable, engaging tale."

-- Gary Rivlin, author of *Katrina; After the Flood*

"Anyone who is interested in Hurricane Katrina, and in America's failing infrastructure, will want to read this book told in a fast-paced narrative."

-- Scott G. Knowles, head of the Department of History at Drexel University and author of *The Disaster Experts: Mastering Risk in Modern America*

"[A]n invaluable memoir of the making of an activist. In a world crying out for citizen action around increasingly desperate climate issues, her story is timely and instructive— and even hopeful."

-- Michael Tisserand, author *The Kingdom of Zydeco*

"It took a tireless, driven citizen movement to set the record right...."

-- John Stauber, author *Toxic Sludge Is Good for You!*

"[A] quick-moving tale. It makes for a gripping read."

-- Roberta Gratz, author *We're Still Here Ya Bastards*

"Sandy [Rosenthal] is relentless in her efforts to hold government and political leaders accountable."

-- James Cobb, author of *Flood of Lies*

"[O]ne of the biggest challenges of understanding New Orleans has been to understand what happened in that flood, and why, and what it means. I don't know of any individual who has done more to elucidate these matters than Sandy Rosenthal."

-- Thomas Beller, Associate Professor of English and Director of Creative Writing at Tulane University, author of four books and contributor to the *New Yorker*, and *The New York Times*.

"Ignore her at your own peril."

--Lolis Eric Elie, former *Times-Picayune* columnist and producer the film, *Faubourg Tremé: the Untold Story of Black New Orleans*

"The book reads like a Grisham novel at Pensacola Beach in the summer."

-- Hopper, Amazon Reviewer

META Data

Words Whispered in Water:

Why the Levees Broke in Hurricane Katrina

By Sandy Rosenthal, founder of Levees.org

Mango Publishing, 2020, paperback, 6" x 9", 346 pages, US\$19.95

ISBN-10: 1642503274; ISBN-13: 978-1642503272

Keywords

Levees.org, Army Corps of Engineers, flood, flooding, flood control, levee, flood wall, Hurricane Katrina, Hurricane Rita, Hurricane Gustav, astroturfing, activism, civic activist, FEMA, natural disasters, disaster recovery, U.S. history, American history, New Orleans history

Keynames

Author Sandy Rosenthal; actor Harry Shearer; actor John Goodman; US Senator Mary Landrieu; General Russell Honore; Max Mayfield from the National Hurricane Center; Michael Chertoff, then Secretary of Homeland Security; Michael Brown, failed head of FEMA; disgraced U.S. Senator David Vitter; New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin; President George W. Bush; political commentator, James Carville

Keyplaces

New Orleans, Louisiana, Lafayette, Baton Rouge, Audubon Park, Isidore Newman School, Mississippi, Alabama, Texas, Florida, Gulf Coast, Washington DC, Mount Holyoke, Tulane University, United States

One-Sentence Summary

A readable, engaging tale of activist Sandy Rosenthal's battle to expose the culprit in the catastrophic levee failures and flooding of New Orleans during Hurricane Katrina.

5 Things to Know About Floods

1. Know Your Flood Zone
2. Know Your Flood History
3. Know Your Flood Coverage
4. Know Your Plan
5. Know Your Rights

Book Summary

Words Whispered in Waters is a blow-by-blow account of citizen investigator and activist Sandy Rosenthal's battle to get the Army Corps of Engineers to take responsibility for the flood wall failures in New Orleans during Hurricane Katrina.

To provide context, Sandy Rosenthal describes her own evacuation experience first to Jackson, Mississippi, then to Lafayette, Louisiana, where her family lives until they can go home to New Orleans. When a random person blames New Orleans residents for their misfortune, Sandy Rosenthal's eyes are opened to the massive myths swirling around the worst civil engineering disaster in US history. That incident sparks her to start Levees.org, a true grassroots group looking into the causes of the floodwall failures.

Instantly, Rosenthal is attacked by a public relations firm and the Army Corps of Engineers itself, who infiltrate Levees.org and try to sabotage every move it makes. In one of her first victories, Rosenthal is able to trace harassing comments back to the Army Corps' public affairs office, resulting in a Pentagon investigation and an embarrassing rebuke of the Corps.

As the feisty activist refuses to stand down, she is joined by an amazing support group including actors Harry Shearer and John Goodman; US Senator Mary Landrieu; Internet experts Jon Donley and Ken McCarthy. She presses for an 8/29 Investigation to independently examine the levee breaches.

When the independent investigation fails to gain Congressional approval, does Rosenthal give up? No! She hatches a plan to convince an elite team of levee experts, the Berkeley team--which conducted the initial levee studies right after the flood--to correct their conclusions! And they do!

Words Whispered in Waters features a familiar cast of characters from the 2005 flood, including General Russell Honore; Max Mayfield from the National Hurricane Center; Michael Chertoff, then Secretary of Homeland Security; Michael Brown, failed head of FEMA; disgraced U.S. Senator David Vitter; New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin; and commentator, James Carville.

Ultimately, Levees.org is able to build a sustainable watchdog group examining the work of the Army Corps of Engineers and the many levee failures that have occurred since Hurricane Katrina around the United States. The work of Sandy Rosenthal and Levees.org has led to significant changes in the way levee failures are examined and the way FEMA responds to the victims of levee failure.

Recommended Excerpts from Paperback

64-67 Excerpt: The Big Lie

Just 4 weeks after the flooding, a high level federal official testified to Congress that the Army Corps struggled to complete the flood defenses on time, and failed because they were hamstrung by local New Orleans officials. Rosenthal realizes this was the foundation for the Big Lie.

74-75 Excerpt: Just Seven Weeks

Just seven weeks after the flooding, a group of businessmen decided they, and they alone, knew who was responsible. While people had yet to be found in their attics, a bill was crafted and ready to go for them to take control of levee tax dollars.

197-201 Excerpt: The ASCE backs down

Sandy Rosenthal is threatened with lawsuit over a satirical video she created that spoofed the Army Corps of Engineers' cozy relationship with an elite trade group. Rosenthal gets pro bono legal assistance and pushes back, forcing the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) to back off.

221-225 Excerpt: Army Corps caught in scandal

Using free software tools, Sandy Rosenthal discovers that members of the Army Corps of Engineers used its computers to attack and harass her, and her group, publicly online. The discovery results in heavy media coverage and a Pentagon investigation.

249-251 Excerpt: Changes that make everyone safer

"In preparing the nomination, I discovered that the list of changes to national policy was long." This is followed by a bulleted list of accomplishments concluding with the PETS Act requiring FEMA to prepare to evacuate pets in catastrophes. Separating people from their pets caused many to not seek shelter during Hurricane Katrina.

Comparisons with Covid-19 Lockdown

What New Orleans went through in the summer 2005 bears strong resemblance to what America is going through as a result of the Covid-19 shutdown:

- Sudden change in routine ("new normal")
- Indefinite school closures
- Widespread unemployment
- Nursing home nightmares
- Feelings of needing to purge the unnecessary
- The feeling of seeing friends again for the first time in months
- What a big deal Thanksgiving becomes
- Desire to turn disaster into a force for improvement
- Beware the rush to pass bad legislation

One-Liners & Power Paragraphs From Paperback

66 Zinger "So it began. Four weeks after the flooding that took the lives of at least 1577 people and nearly drowned an entire city, our Congress had a false perception."

77 Zinger: "... the flooding was due directly to mistakes that engineers with the Army Corps had made in the 1980s."

78 Power Paragraph: "Congress held a decidedly suspicious view of the people of New Orleans. The idea that New Orleanians had brought their misery upon themselves was easy to accept and did not require reshaping one's world view."

85 Zinger: "... 80 percent of New Orleans residents lost everything -- or almost everything -- and they were being blamed for it. They were also considered stupid for living there and undeserving of help. Something had to be done!"

99 Zinger: New Orleans a month after the flood: "There seemed to be a permanent stench everywhere, including in the portion of the city that saw no flooding. It was a ghastly combination of mold, rot, oil, rancid food, rotting meat -- and death."

156 Zinger: "I felt like a character in a B-rate movie, fighting against almost everyone."

185 Zinger "I stared back with the calm that comes from having thoroughly done one's homework."

225 Power Paragraph: "The folks at the Army Corps' New Orleans District Public Affairs Office -- and those above them -- had likely thought they were so clever by thinking that they could surreptitiously attack me [using online discussion forums] and remain anonymous. But I could see them. And now their activity would be exposed."

247 Zinger: "As usual, by asking questions until I received an answer that satisfied me, I got to the facts either on purpose or by accident."

272 Zinger: "We wanted the Berkeley team co-chairs to retract their wrong conclusion and replace it with the right conclusion."

237 Power Paragraph: The Army Corps of Engineers pays a public relations firm nearly \$5 million in an effort to prevent an independent study of the flood wall failures and protect its reputation.

299 Zinger: "The civic activist cannot give up, even though it is tempting to do so."