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Hey, BP: Show Me the (Proximity) Money
By LAWRENCE HAAS

Keith Overton, who runs the TradeWinds Resort in St. Pete Beach, FL, thinks he deserves a piece of the \$20 billion oil spill fund that BP set up in the aftermath of last April's disaster in the Gulf of Mexico.

To be sure, the oil never reached St. Pete Beach. In fact, it didn't come within hundreds of miles of this barrier-island city.

But, Overton told the *New York Times* for its October 23 piece on the issue, potential visitors to his resort of 800 hotel rooms and condo rentals and 13 bars and restaurants feared that the oil would eventually find its way there. So, they decided to vacation elsewhere – and that, he says, caused his profits from April to late October to fall by more than \$1 million compared to the same period over the previous three years.

Overton feels aggrieved and he's not alone. "More than 100,000 entities in Florida will make what are known as proximity claims, which are based on arguments of indirect harm," the *Times* reported. In fact, claims filed to date from Florida outnumber those from Louisiana, which suffered the direct harm of real oil.

"Proximity claim?" "Indirect harm?" I know how Overton feels. He's not the only one who suffered when the drilling rig exploded. I must have suffered as well.

Here's my story (or, here's a story I probably can sell to the powers that be to get me some of that oil money).

Last April, my wife and 11-year-old daughter planned to vacation for a few days by themselves in Florida, and I set aside the time to stay home and work on a writing proposal. If the part-time job came through, it would mean real bucks for me on an ongoing basis.

Then came the oil, which scared the daylights out of my wife and daughter. They canceled their vacation and, since it was too late for them to plan anything else, they decided to spend their few days at home.

I tried to work while they were around, but it wasn't easy.

On the first day, my daughter planted herself at the side of my chair at the computer and demanded my attention. I tried to explain that I needed to work, but she was having none of it. She talked, then she yelled, then she cried until I finally told her to get lost, which only made her cry louder in the next room, open door and all.

My wife didn't make things better. She came in to tell me I was being mean, which prompted my daughter to cry louder and call me a "meanie."

Getting no work done, I surrendered.

The three of us spent all of the next two days together. We visited museums along the Washington Mall, walked along a delightful path near our home, and ordered in dinner so we could eat while watching the movies we rented from Blockbuster.

Frankly, I had a grand old time.

But I never did get that proposal done. And without a proposal, I didn't get the writing assignment. And without the assignment, I didn't get the money I was banking on to repaint our downstairs.

You know what? None of this would have happened if BP hadn't let the oil gush.

I'm 54, and I've got at least another 15 years left to work. The writing would have generated \$5,000 a month in income. So, let's see: \$5,000 a month is \$60,000 a year, which is \$900,000 over the next 15 years.

I'm sure I'll be healthy enough to work for more than 15 years, but I don't want to seem too greedy.

But, hey, fair is fair. I want my piece of the action. So, get me a lawyer. I'm filing a proximity claim. The way I see it, and the way the dollars add up, I could have suffered about as much as that whiny guy in St. Pete Beach.

Where's my money?