

Gulf Coast Listening Project in the vicinity of Birmingham, AL

Introduction:

2005 was a year with a record number of named storms, the worst of which was Hurricane Katrina which struck the Gulf Coast of the United States in late August. Although it was expected to be a Category 5 Hurricane, thousands of people in New Orleans did not evacuate prior to the storm hitting. Most of those who did not evacuate were sent to the New Orleans Superdome where they were expected to wait out the storm. As we saw on television, most at the Superdome were African American. Most did not evacuate because they did not have the means or the transportation. This plan may have worked if the levees holding in Lake Ponchartrain held but they were breached and New Orleans was flooded, including the Superdome where tens of thousands of people were. There they were in flooded waters, no electricity and no working sewage system. Not just New Orleans., but the surrounding parishes were either flooded and houses and business were damaged beyond repair by wind and/or driving rain. The houses along the Gulf Coast of Mississippi were demolished. These problems were all exacerbated by the inept response by FEMA, the insurance companies trying to escape their responsibilities and other agencies not performing as well as they should have.

The Gulf Coast Listening Project (GCLP) was initiated by the Rural Southern Voice for Peace and was conducted in three areas where evacuees from Katrina had landed. Besides Birmingham, it was also conducted in Atlanta, GA and Columbia, SC. The project was sponsored locally by Birmingham Friends Meeting, Greater Birmingham Ministries, and the National Conference for Community and Justice. Many other churches, organizations and individuals also participated throughout the process. Following is contact information for the national organization and local sponsors:

National Gulf Coast Listening Project (GCLP)

Herb Walters, Director, Rural Southern Voice for Peace
828-675-4626
hwalters@yancey.main.nc.us

Rebecca Bowe, National Media Campaign Coordinator
510-457-8799
rbowe22@hotmail.com

Local Contacts

Birmingham Friends Meeting

Peter Furst, Coordinator
205-595-9768
p_furst@yahoo.com

Connie LaMonte
205-592-2838
clamonte@aol.com

Greater Birmingham Ministries (GBM)
George Thompson
205-326-6821 ext 115
george@gbm.org

National Conference for Community and Justice (NCCJ)
Cathy Corley
205-322-4100 ext 304
ccorley@nccj.org

Overview:

This is a report of the GCLP project that was conducted in the Birmingham, AL, area. Fewer interviews were conducted than anticipated. We had originally anticipated doing at least 30 interviews but for several reasons we only came up with thirteen. We may still do some more interviews but they will not be included in this report. We did have the names of several potential interviewees that had indicated that they wanted to or were willing to be interviewed, but we were not able to get them to commit to a time for the interview.

Thirteen different people were interviewed. Of those interviewed, several had been in FEMA trailers at a state park, one was still there at the time of the interview, one had moved into a HUD house, one was still in a FEMA trailer but had been moved to a private RV park in Cullman County about 30 miles north of Birmingham. One interviewee was in a public housing project, two were in rental homes that were being paid for by FEMA and one was in an apartment and was receiving rental assistance from FEMA.

There were differing views on race being a factor in how they were treated; some, both white and African-American, did not think that race was a factor in how they were treated, others said that race was definitely a factor in how people were treated and gave some examples.

Several valid reasons were given as to why people did not evacuate:

- It was the end of the month and those who were only getting money once a month did not have the money necessary to evacuate.
- Many did not have cars either because they couldn't afford one or because a car is not needed with a good public transportation system.
- Some had never evacuated for any storm before and they believed they could ride out this storm, too.
- Some believed that by staying they could protect what they owned.
- Lack of or confusing communication about the storm
- The call for mandatory evacuation was too late.

Demographics:

- **Number of Interviewees:** Total 13 Male 3 Female 10
- **Race or Ethnic Origin:** African American 5 White 7
Mixed (African American/White/Creole) 1
- **Marital Status:** Single 8 Married 5

Observation:

- **Current Living Conditions and Needs of Evacuees**
 - To move from a place that has or had a very good public transportation system to an area that has an extremely poor public transportation makes it very difficult for those who are unable to drive or do not own a car.
 - Many survivors are far from self-sufficiency at this time. Assistance is still needed.
- **Recovery from the Hurricane; Coping with Daily Life as an Evacuee**
 - Those who had been in the state park said that churches and the local people had been very generous and helped with both supplies and groceries. Those who were not in a location that housed multiple evacuees did not get nearly as much help from the local churches or the local people, unless as happened with one participant, her family was adopted by a local church. They emphasized that it was the churches and the people in the area, not the government that reached out to them the most.
 - Religious beliefs were very important to most of the interviewees and it was those beliefs that sustained them through much of their ordeals.
 - Extraordinary patience was needed by the evacuees. Already dealing with unimaginable losses, both human and material, they were -- and still are -- subjected to extreme stress brought on by difficulties in communication. Waiting in line (often at several locations), filling out forms which required information (like birth certificates and Social Security cards) that they did not have with them, calling agencies and then having to be available for return phone calls, applying for jobs but not having transportation, enduring delays in news about their family members, not being in the right "phase" for services -- all these required superhuman patience and stamina. Many evacuees expressed understandable frustration about the red tape involved in getting services.
- **Government Response to Katrina**
 - FEMA was criticized by all the survivors: for not having properly trained employees, for not co-operating with other agencies, even other FEMA offices, for having little or no consideration for the people that they were supposedly trying to help, for changing rules in mid-stream and having rules that practically made it impossible to hold down a full time job and still do the things one needed to do to comply with the FEMA rules.

- **Poverty Issues relevant to Past, Present and Future**

- Some government programs that were intended to help the impoverished were instead keeping them in poverty. For example, if a poor person who relied on Medicaid got a job without benefits, they may no longer be qualified for Medicaid but they would not be able to afford health insurance.
- The effects of poverty on the human condition are often not considered. Poverty has a profound effect on the self-confidence of individuals, leading to low self esteem and depression. This makes it extremely difficult to find the energy and motivation to work toward self improvement.
- Some government programs, like food stamps and Medicaid, only provide services for people in extreme poverty, and do not provide any benefits for the working poor who do not make enough to pay for these services themselves.

- **Race Issues relevant to Past, Present and Future**

- There was a wide range of opinions about race being an issue. Some said that poverty and not race was the main issue in New Orleans. Fear of gang members and looters played a factor in some attitudes. The media played a tremendous role in fanning those fears along racial divides. It was obvious from the interviews that racism, in subtle and not so subtle forms, does exist, not only in New Orleans but throughout the United States.

- **Suggestions / Ideas for Change**

- There seems to be a disconnect between the provision/delivery of services and the receiving of them. Even as agencies became organized and were aware of the enormous challenges, there were impediments in the evacuees being able to access these services. One example is when FEMA offered a choice of state parks to go to, the people didn't know where the state parks were located or whether they were going to be closer to or farther from family, resource centers, or possible jobs. So making a decision was difficult. Another example is that bank cards needed PIN numbers in order to be activated but it took two weeks to get a PIN number. By then, the location of an evacuee may have changed. In addition, the deadlines set for moving out of shelters were far too soon; evacuees simply didn't have time to make appropriate arrangements before they were told that a particular shelter would be closed. With all good intent by the agencies, the guidelines for receiving services often did not accommodate the incredible dislocation and its effects on the evacuees. Future responses should take this into consideration. FEMA should be mindful of the humanity of their clients, being considerate of the needs and limitations of each. FEMA must do a better job of giving people all the information they need to make decisions. They should have better internal coordination between their national, regional and local offices. In addition, they should coordinate better with all local organizations and providers.

- Response to any type of disaster needs to include counseling programs aimed at not only surviving the disaster but also overcoming low self esteem issues. Such counseling should be available to all who receive government assistance at normal times as well as in response to disasters.
- **Other Observations**
 - For some reason, women seem to be more eager to tell their story than men. The husband of one of the survivors that we interviewed at first sat in on the interview but soon got up and left. Later he said the reason he left was that he just couldn't go through that again.
 - Giving people a chance to tell their story was valuable in itself to both the people telling the story and to the listeners who gained a better understanding of what the Katrina survivors went through and are still going through.

Future Plans:

The Gulf Coast Listening Project here in Birmingham has brought together a variety of volunteers and agencies to meet and listen to individuals and families displaced by the natural and social disasters of Hurricane Katrina. In the process of doing the interviews, we realized the similarities between the frustrated evacuees and the challenges of those who have struggled to survive in Birmingham for years. Lack of safe affordable housing, limited and unreliable public transportation, heavy taxation on food and necessities, lack of living wage jobs, lack of affordable and accessible healthcare and other systems have for so long disenfranchised and overburdened the poor, the weak and the vulnerable. As national programs and assistance fade, the evacuees are having to find assistance, like the indigent population already in Alabama, at agencies already strained beyond their resources.

As we move forward and lift up the stories of those struggling to reclaim community after Katrina, the Birmingham GCLP feels the necessity to lift up the stories of all who struggle to survive here - both those impoverished by the effects of the storm and the already indigent population. We want to begin with gatherings of the volunteers and the interviewees to maintain the relationships already begun and to discuss the formation of a task force. The task force must include representation from many groups, including 1) the many agencies serving the poor in the area including those who serve the evacuees, 2) already existent grass-root coalitions and advocacy groups, and 3) individuals and families who have been affected, both evacuees and those who have struggled for years. Representation from all groups will be required in the planning process. Too often, the poor have been the recipients of services without being included in the initial stage of developing the services and the logistics of how, when and where the services are delivered. The task force would determine the issues needing to be addressed and discuss ways to better engage those affected and the agencies providing assistance and revise systems to better serve the needs of the citizens. By working together and lifting up the stories and voices of ALL our poor, the Birmingham GCLP hopes to engage the larger community in the long overdue process of finding just and compassionate solutions to the many systemic problems.

The Survivors:

Sable is from Jefferson Parish - she is a remarkably articulate and organized person. She kept track of every phone call and contact she made during her relocation to the Birmingham area first and then to Cullman County to the north. Her determination and feistiness are not new; she spoke of working hard her whole life and also described herself in this way: "God made me mean for a reason." While hardly "mean," her ability to track down resources never wavered, even when beset with roadblocks such as people not calling her back or telling her she wasn't eligible for a particular service. She was able to describe her frustrating experiences with understanding and grace, expressing both strength and tenderness in her attitude and behavior. And in spite of the trauma of the past year, she also has a good sense of humor. Sable is a fiercely independent woman who had lived her whole life along the Louisiana coast and this was the only storm that she had ever evacuated for. Shortly before the storm her husband had open heart surgery so he was not able to be much help during the evacuation. She had been having health problems also and had been getting treatment at Charity Hospital as she had no health insurance. Her husband does have health insurance so he is able to get treatment locally, but she does not have health insurance and she is having trouble finding healthcare locally. Her husband has previously had several back surgeries and he gets some disability but not enough to live on. Sable wants to get some more job training so that she can get a job and help support herself and her husband. She had the foresight to bring all the important documents for identification. She was working and except for healthcare, she and her husband were able to provide for themselves and not depend on anyone else. It was very hard to be in a position where they "had to depend on complete strangers" for their next meal.

Janice is a very social person who lived in New Orleans in an area that she loved where there was a strong sense of community. Many of the people in her family also lived in the New Orleans area, and when they decided to evacuate, they formed a caravan with 57 people from her family who came to Birmingham. She went back to school when she was 45 and became a teacher. At first she thought they had landed in heaven but as time goes on, people say, why don't you go home or why don't you get a job? She is very upset with the organizations from FEMA to the Salvation Army that make them feel like beggars when they try to get help. She is adamant about re-building New Orleans and has written a paper giving her reasons why she believes it should be re-built. This paper follows at the end of this report. She believes that race plays a big part in how people are treated. She said that during Mardi Gras if African-American kids were standing by themselves, beads would not be thrown to them from the floats, so she told her kids to stand next to the white kids. She believes that the effects of slavery are not over and that perhaps African-Americans were better off during the times of segregation.

Sherman is a person of limitless vocabulary and zest for living. He has a medical condition that prevents him from driving and has experienced first-hand Birmingham's inadequate public transportation system. Sherman is a leader and an organizer; when he arrived here from New Orleans, he quickly took charge at the local FEMA shelter. His style of leadership is one that empowers others and he has a gift for motivating others to speak up for themselves. Sherman refuses to accept the status quo. One of his first acts of advocacy while at the shelter was to write a letter to the president (and copied many senators/representatives) that the imminent closing of the shelter was an injustice. He reads widely, is a self-taught expert on the Bible and has taught

many classes in churches. His greatest loss was his library of 2000 books and thirty years of research. Sherman talks in a poetic and engaging manner, using rich metaphors to highlight important points. He also is a writer and was about to publish a book. Sherman's love of others, no matter what race, is evident to all.

Lucy reported that they were "living the American dream" as they had just bought a house in Metairie and one of their three sons had just started college. Her husband had a good job and she was working as a waitress. When they first evacuated, they went to Covington, La. to stay with her mother-in-law but that was not far enough away from the storm. Then they went to Muncie, In., where her mother lives. Lucy said her mother had survived the holocaust and as a result had more empathy for the Katrina evacuees than she might have otherwise. Her husband has since been diagnosed with a collapsed lung and pneumonia, possibly from cleaning out the refrigerator when they went back. Her husband got a job offer from a previous employer and that is what brought them to Birmingham. They were able to sell their house in Metairie for a profit and bought a house here. Transportation is difficult, especially for her son, who does not have a car and the public transportation in the Birmingham area is so bad. They are slowly getting to know people through their church and through the Winn-Dixie where her son works. Her oldest son goes to one Baptist church and she goes to another. Her 14 year old son does not believe in God. This is hard for her. She said to him "how can you be angry at God if there is no God?"

Patrick is an 18 year old who is autistic but is a highly functioning. He was working at Winn-Dixie right up until the family decided to evacuate and since being in this area is now working at a Winn-Dixie here. He is currently living with his parents and brother but he thinks that someday he would like to move back. He is going on a church sponsored trip to Louisiana to help with the Katrina recovery efforts.

Dianne said they were lucky in a sense, in that they had been looking to buy a house in St. Bernard's Parish but had not done so prior to Katrina's arrival. Their exodus from Katrina was a nightmare: the road to Florida was a parking lot. They would have evacuated sooner but they couldn't talk her father-in-law to leave and leave his two dogs behind. Like many others, they thought they would just get out of Katrina's way for a few days, then move back home. In June they had tried to purchase flood insurance but were told they were not in a flood zone and didn't need it. After spending several months in a FEMA trailer at Oak Mountain State Park, they were offered a HUD house in Calera, Al. This comes rent free for a year; then they have the option to buy it. They intend to purchase the house at the end of their year in it. Dianne has a deep faith and said that every time she prayed, God answered her prayers.

Kristy is from St. Bernard's Parish and she comes from a very close family who all lived in close proximity. She was still mourning the death of her grandmother who had died in June, just 3 months before the storm. She, her husband and her two sons, age 15 and 4, live in a FEMA trailer at Oak Mountain State Park. Her 20 year old daughter moved back to the New Orleans area. The hard part for her was not having her father and grandfather close by. Although her husband has a job, he works back on the coast and only comes back on week-ends. Her 4 year old is having trouble because he can't understand why his father is away so much of the time. They got a lot of help from churches in the area but as a Catholic, she was upset by the lack of

support from any Catholic church. She would like to stay in the FEMA trailer at Oak Mountain until they can get a FEMA trailer back on the coast, but FEMA-Alabama makes no effort to communicate or coordinate with FEMA-Louisiana.

Evelyn loaded her non-traditional family (2 sons by different fathers, a new boyfriend of 3 weeks and the boyfriend's "slow brother"), some food, identification and eligibility papers, into an old car and left Gulfport Sunday morning before Katrina hit. They took a friend to Florida, and then came to Birmingham, stopping in South Georgia to call FEMA and register for help the afternoon after the storm hit. It was not the first time they had "run" but it may be their last. A woman of limited education but a great deal of street savvy, she knows the resources available and began to pursue them immediately. Arriving just as the Birmingham Civic Center began accepting evacuees, she impressed a volunteer there enough that he recommended her family to friends in Avondale who wanted to help a family. Within less than a month, she and the two men had jobs, an apartment, furniture, and a vehicle to replace the one that broke down after arriving in Birmingham. Much of this was due to "the kindness of strangers;" the host family appealed to neighbors and friends via word of mouth and e-mail, and both money and furnishings poured in. Before she arrived at the Civic Center, she had dropped off her two young sons at the airport; the father of the youngest flew them both to Arizona, keeping the oldest until Christmas. En route to the Civic Center from the airport, she saw a sign advertising jobs, wrote down the number and shortly had a job sitting the elderly and sick, supplemented by house sitting. She credited her "good luck" to "the Lord" rather than her own gutsy determination and knowledge of the system. As the head of a matriarchal family she kept an iron hand on the purse strings. She was disappointed that Katrina disrupted her course in massage therapy and was concerned about how her son, Mitch, was doing in school. She felt that she probably had it as good here as in Gulfport, maybe even better.

Mitch is a bright 12 year old, the eldest son of Evelyn. Easy going and responsive, he described the upheaval of the hurricane, the frightening experience of having waves of water hit the car, and the lack of security in his life. Mitch said that he felt lucky to get out of the storm and be able to take most things in the car. His great loss was his "memories," his baby pictures, which were hanging in trees and floating in the water. He also worried about his friends in Gulfport because he didn't know what had happened to them. Mitch moved to Arizona soon after the hurricane to live with his younger brother and his brother's father. At this point, he wants to live together as a family again and have his little brother come to Birmingham.

Elizabeth was in New Orleans during the storm. She had contracted with Norfolk & Southern Railroad to clean the employee barracks and was living in housing supplied by N&S. She had never evacuated for a storm before and decided to ride out Katrina as well, even though other N&S employees were telling her she needed to leave. Elizabeth and her adult son were in the computer room of the barracks when the levees were breached and water started to come in so fast that she was afraid that they would have gotten washed away if they had been outside. They spent three days in chest-high water before they were able to get someone's attention. She doesn't remember being hungry, but they did get some food from a few of the employees' lockers. A man came by in a boat but had other passengers; he returned the next day and took them, one at a time, to an overpass where they slept on the ground. Elizabeth has arthritis and her physical condition was deteriorating. Her son finally convinced someone that she was sick and needed help so they were then put on a bus with others who were sick and then

flown to Chicago. Elizabeth guessed that about 20% of the people on the overpass were white and said that they did seem to be getting more attention from the rescuers than the African-Americans. She stayed in Chicago with her daughter until December and then moved Birmingham, where she is originally from (she has another son here). She is currently living in an apartment and is getting rental assistance from FEMA. Elizabeth has been volunteering at the Habitat for Humanity store and hopes to get qualified for a Habitat house. Her son, who came with her from New Orleans, is living with her and working at a Publix store.

Ashia is the only evacuee we interviewed who was at the Superdome. Ashia (four months pregnant at the time), her four children and the children's father, drove to the Superdome the day before Katrina hit under mandatory evacuation orders. They were joined by her mother, father, younger brother, and other relatives. They would have evacuated sooner but the only car they had was not reliable and also they did not have enough money for gas. After seven horrendous days, they boarded a bus to Huntsville, TX. At first, she felt safe at the Superdome because the authorities were checking bags for guns and the police chief talked to everyone, telling them that there was food available. Then the situation deteriorated. When the storm came, pieces of the ceiling fell down and rain was pouring in. The power went out, the toilets didn't work, and sewage backed up in the hallway. Her children began throwing up and soiling their clothes. She found a place for them to sleep on an outside ramp; the smell inside the building was "horrible" as the smell of feces and urine were everywhere. There was a lot of violence, with fights, rapes and gunshots. The family which now includes her husband, their new daughter, the four older children, her mother and her brother, is living in a rental house in Birmingham that is being paid for with FEMA vouchers. At the end of the interview, Ashia showed us her wedding pictures. Saying that "some good things came out of the storm", she and the children's father were married in May and their house is decorated with photographs and bouquets from their wedding.

Sadie is an outgoing mother of two sons. She is an avid reader focused on her faith. She has experienced great loss since 2000 with 11 deaths in the family, including her mother in 2002 and her father in 2000. Because of medical issues, she had to cut back her hours at work and had struggled to get back on her feet after her parents death. One month prior to the storm, she and her children had finally moved into their own home and had begun to feel comfortable. Thanks to her brother who manages a hotel in the French Quarter, she, her sons and many other relatives headed to Birmingham, where her two sisters live, prior to the arrival of the storm. One of her sisters took in 13 of those family members, sharing a 2- bedroom house. While she was greatly comforted by the generosity of her family and their churches, she has learned the difficulty of surviving in Birmingham and Alabama. Utility costs in public housing have devastated her ability to maintain a budget, the public transportation system is so limiting, and services agencies keep requiring documentation that has been lost in the storm. Through all the difficulties, she continues to keep hope alive through her strong faith.

J.J. is a shy 14 year old son of Sadie. He has experienced too many deaths in his family for a child his age. Hurricane Katrina has added to the feeling of loss. He has never lived outside of New Orleans. His extended family is now scattered across the Southeast. A cousin was shot in Texas after she cashed one of the checks sent to the evacuees. All the loss has taken its toll on him, and he has begun to lash out at school. Luckily he has found comfort in the ROTC program at the school he now attends. He prays that he will never have to go through a similar experience again.

1. Life Before Katrina

Housing: Owned Home 4 Rented 5 Company Housing 1
Living Situation: Lived Alone 1 Lived w/ Parents 3 Shared Home w/ others in Family 12
Employment: Unemployed 2 Full Time 7 Part Time 2, 1(2jobs)
Health: Health an issue: 4

Had just bought a house in Metairie. Both she and her husband were working - they were "Living the American Dream" (LL)

"Real Simple" (PD)

"Katrina is not over" Had lived in same home and neighborhood for 26 years. Had flood insurance but damage was from driven rain. (SG)

Going to school full-time, working 2 part-time jobs (EK)

Looking to buy a home but had not yet found one to buy "Thank God". Had tried to get flood insurance in June 2005 but were told they were not in a flood zone and didn't need it. Her father-in-law lost everything and he has not received any compensation. (DW)

Had been working fulltime but wasn't at the time of storm. Husband was working fulltime in a printing business that was destroyed by the storm. House was paid for but was in a no-flood zone so they couldn't have gotten flood insurance. (KC)

"It was OK... we had this nice house. It had a sunroom and lots of windows. And we were pretty happy. Then we have this Katrina thing." (MY) youth

Was writing a book to be published at Christmas. Lost 99% of everything I owned. - "Really loved" my job as a pre-employment trainer of trainees. - "You work hard to get a position and move forward and then a disaster...When you get something, you get it. Don't wait. Run and get it." (SB)

Used to live in Birmingham but moved to New Orleans many years ago. Operated the dormitory (barracks) of railroad housing in New Orleans for twenty years; lived there with her 44 year old son. (EC)

Had just rented a house a week before the storm hit. Worked at Alamo in security. Was "basically a working single mom." (AC)

2. Leaving Home

When left: Before 11 After 2

Leaving cat behind - "We wanted for nothing." EK

Her husband just had open heart surgery several days before the storm. Took 10 1/2 hours to get to Baton Rouge (normally takes 1 to 1 1/2 hours). Found a room but had to evacuate the next day due to flooding. Found another place and stayed two weeks. "This is the first storm I have evacuated from." Had to leave our dog (tears). Came to Oak Mountain State Park in Birmingham. (SG)

The "Blessings just kept coming" SW

Her husband's father wasn't going to leave because he didn't want to leave his 2 dogs. She had lived in Louisiana all her life and had never left for a storm before. Finally 12 hours before the storm was due to hit they convinced her father-in-law to leave. On the road it was a nightmare - going toward Florida was like a parking lot. Got to Lake City, FL and stayed 4 or 5 days. Her husband was an off-shore captain and needed to get back closer to where he could get back to work. In line to get gas when station closed. No place to stay, motel let them stay in lobby. "Every time I prayed, the lord helped us". Got to Lafayette, LA., then (hurricane) Rita came. Their daughter (who lived with them) had gone to Texas, where she applied for help from FEMA, so when they applied for help from FEMA they were accused of double dipping as this was the second application for the same address. Never got any help from FEMA other than Trailer. They stayed in Lafayette for six weeks, all that time their 15 year old son was not in school. Her sister persuaded her to come to Alabama. (DW)

Her niece was trapped on bridge for two days and nights. When help came, they "felt more like they were being captured than rescued." - The stories of the young men who went house to house rescuing people needs to be told. They would turn refrigerators over and use them as boats to take people to safety. (JC)

They evacuated three days before the storm with their three kids. Left everything behind, including husband's father and grandfather. She was very sad about leaving her family photographs - "You can't go back in time and re-experience it." They left St. Bernard's Parish, stopped by Riverchase Best Western, then drove on to NC where they had relatives. They heard how bad the storm had hit so came back to Birmingham where they met her mother at Oak Mountain, stayed in a cabin until they got a FEMA trailer. - She said it was a very scary time because they didn't know whether her father was alive for 1 1/2 weeks. He had been evacuated on a bus but got off it when it stopped at a store (he hid); went back home and started repair work on their home. (KC)

He had a disaster plan to get out of New Orleans. Hurricanes come in 40-year cycles --- 1925, 1965, Katrina. He had a list of 20 people to call. He can't drive because of disorientation (medical problem). He saw three disasters happening: being caught in house and isolated for weeks; being caught at convention center; being caught at the Super Dome. Since he "didn't want any part of those three" he found a ride, but only had a half-hour to get things -- computer and a bag of clothes. He had to leave library of over 2000 books. "I asked the Lord what book to bring and the Lord said '*Twelve Conditions of a Miracle*' so I grabbed one book." His biggest frustration: leaving 30 years of research. (SB)

She decided to ride out the storm even though others were telling her that she needed to leave. She and her son were in the barracks computer room when the levees broke. They had "scooped up stuff to take to the main office (a two story building across the street) but the water rose so quickly that they couldn't get across the street. The building they were in was a one story building so they couldn't get out of the water. They stood in water up to their chests for three days. They ate potato chips and some food they found in the lockers. .. She made a flag from a rod and the kitchen curtain to get the attention of the helicopters. A guy came by in a boat en route to get others and said he would return the next day. ...The rescuer put them on top of an overpass where they spent the night. She had started deteriorating [from arthritis.] Her son has diabetes and was without medication for three days. Elizabeth and her son were eventually put on a bus and then a United Way plane to Chicago where they stayed with her daughter from Sep. 1 to Dec. 22. Then they relocated to Birmingham. (EC)

They didn't have a reliable vehicle so they couldn't get out of the city also they didn't have enough money to buy gas. So they drove to the Superdome the day before the storm. She was very frustrated with the mandatory evacuation requirement and said "How are you going to do that?" She had no money and no transportation. Stayed at the Superdome from Sunday to the following Saturday in horrendous conditions although they were reassured at first by the presence of guards and the police chief. It was night when Katrina came and the whole building was shaking; pieces of the roof blew off and rain poured in. Sanitary conditions were deplorable: the plumbing didn't work, raw sewage backed up in the hallway; the power went out on the second night; it was hot and smelly. The National Guard came with ready-to-eat meals but threw them at the evacuees; they resented being called "refugees." On the third day, they were allowed to go outside for some fresh air and ended up sleeping outside on a walkway. Various incidents occurred such as a rape of a young teenage girl, beatings, hearing gunshots. Trust in the mayor, governor, and police chief eroded as the evacuees were told different stories about how they were going to get out of the Superdome. They didn't know what was going to happen to them. She commented, "It was all about survival." Her mother is a diabetic and was becoming increasingly ill. When they were told to board a bus for Huntsville, TX, there was only one door to go through. "I've never seen so many people dropping dead in front of me." The family stayed in a shelter for two weeks in Texas (they were told they could stay there for 16 weeks but were "kicked out" after two weeks) and then came to Birmingham. FEMA paid for them to stay in a hotel until March 29 at which point they moved into their current house. Her husband had a job until they were 'rear-ended' by a tractor trailer. He still needs medical attention. The children had problems at school so their mother took them out; they will start at a new school for this coming year. Although they like the neighborhood they are in now, they have been told they will have to move in February or find the money to buy the house. (AC)

He said "....we were just driving and then the waves were starting to get bad and hitting the road....it was so deep the water was up to the tires. ... That was the scary part." - "I lost all my baby pictures. Everything is back in trees and water. What can you say? It's pretty sad." "I didn't know what was happening; I didn't know if my friends were dead." (MY)

3. Family Members

Scattered, six children, all scattered (SG)

Almost all immediate family in Birmingham except one son in Arizona with father - Sons miss relatives in MS (EK)

Sister here in AL; Mom still in Metairie, LA; home damaged but fixable; brother's home in St. Taminy Parish destroyed - he is now in Columbus, MS; Father-in-law living with them, he is totally dependent on them; oldest son still in LA. Her 15year old son wants to go back. (DW)

Scattered -- mostly in LA and Oak Mountain. Lots of family at Oak Mountain. She called some family members after she got to Oak Mountain and told them it was a nice place. (KC).

Comes from a large family, now scattered, but sister and brother in Birmingham. Living in an interim housing facility in East Lake (Birmingham). Stayed a short time with sister but she had 30 people living with her. One sister had to have her leg amputated because she was bitten by a spider, then was walking in contaminated water and it got infected. Rest of family is scattered. (SB)

Two sons live in Birmingham, a daughter is in Chicago, another daughter lives in Atlanta, youngest son is in Virginia. (EC)

She was reunited with her sister in Birmingham but her sister has returned to New Orleans to finish LPN training. Her mother and younger brother came to live with her several months ago. Her aunt was found dead in the house, and she does not know where some family members (aunt, uncle, cousins) or friends are. Her husband was employed but both husband and wife were recently injured in a car accident and he cannot work. Luckily, they had car insurance which they are waiting for now. (AC)

4. The Trip Home

Status of home: Damaged 2 Destroyed 3 OK 0

"I fell on my knees thanking God. Our roof was still on but our neighbors' roofs were not." She had to leave her dog home during the hurricane – since her husband had just had surgery, she left him at the motel and went back after the storm passed over to check on the damage – she couldn't take the dog because the motel they were in didn't allow animals. As she was telling us about this, her eyes became tearful and she said “The look on his (the dog's) face when I had to leave him again... When I left, it was one of the hardest things I ever had to do." The good news was that they were able to go back later and the dog was ok. "When I went back, the city was under martial law. It was like a 3rd world country...The National Guard was walking around with their weapons ready... the Taliban must be very happy, because they could not have done the damage that the storm did"... On her first trip back home she told her neighbor, who was a policeman, “If you see someone looting my home, shoot them. I don't want to support someone in jail who has a roof over their head while I can't live in my own home.” - (SG)

Brick house, left side gone, it had been flooded to the ceiling - (SW)

Only cement slab left of home. "I was shocked - half of the neighborhood to the north was gone. The doctor's office where I worked was gone. " (EK)

Have been back 5 times, nothing going on, garbage everywhere. Seems to be getting worse. (DW)

"Looks normal from the outside but ruined inside from eight feet of water." "My plan is to go back and rebuild." (JC)

Went back during spring vacation but husband has been living/working in St. Bernard's Parish during the week and commuting to Oak Mountain on weekends. House destroyed by water (no flood insurance); they got \$2166 for wind damage -- "You can't start over on \$2100." (KC)

Has not been home. News is "not good." "Nothing's happening."(SB)

Her house was ok. It was on a knoll and therefore did not get flooded even though the houses around theirs were flooded. She said something that living under sea level is not a good idea. (LL)

Has not been home although she wanted to at one point. While in Chicago, she used to dream about it a lot. Elizabeth might go later "when I can cope more." She fears flashbacks. (EC)

She has been home; their house is "ruined" and she has lost all the baby pictures of her children and other family photos. These are an especially hard loss for her and her mother because two of her brothers are deceased. (AC)

5. Current Living Situation

Current Housing: FEMA Trailer 2 House 6 Apartment 5

Others in household - Son – (SW), Husband – (SG) - Son, boyfriend, boyfriend's brother (EK)

Likes it here – in project housing but it doesn't seem like a project. 3 BR, Lost of space (SW)

"Have everything we need." Working with the elderly. (EK)

Just moved (last week) into a HUD house - daughter and father-in-law living with them. 1 year rent free, then option to buy. (DW)

They were able to sell their house in Metairie for a profit and buy a house here. She still wakes up and doesn't quite know where she is. (LL)

Living with two sons and husband (he comes to Oak Mountain on weekends). Started out with no dishes, nothing to cook with, empty trailer. Now fixed up nicely. Has a good vehicle and cell phone (KC)

Living in trailer with husband. "It's a travel trailer --we haven't killed each other yet." (SG)

First, lived with my sister; then, went to a shelter, then hotel suite; now house "which is way too big for me." (HUD house) When in shelter, FEMA told residents on Dec. 28th that they would have to be out on Jan. 7. SB called a residents meeting, wrote a letter and sent it to the President, Homeland Security, and lots of other people. Got into trouble because Birmingham media picked up on this story about the letter. Letter just asked for extension to stay at the shelter. SB found out that his phone was blocked because he didn't get FEMA calls; said it was blocked by the government -- "government issue phone." RE: choice of houses -- too far away from public transportation -- "The key to surviving is transportation so you can find a job, a house." Got the run-around by the Red Cross in Birmingham and at the auditorium, then got sent to Bessemer. Waited seven hours. Told Red Cross "We're not going anywhere." Police told SB said not to come back but SB was trying to organize people to help them with their frustrations. "People couldn't read, couldn't write, and there was no one there to help. If people don't fill out forms properly, then they don't get resources." Current house is 1 1/2 miles from bus stop; bus only comes every hour so if he misses it, he is late for work. (SB)

Lives with son; FEMA helps with apartment expenses. Currently working with Habitat for Humanity, helping a friend with her house and also working odd jobs in the Habitat for Humanity Outlet Store. Hoping to get a Habitat house but isn't 100% qualified yet due to having too many credit cards even those these have very small balances on them. "Made it look like I can't manage money. " Elizabeth and her son attended credit counseling and are waiting for the September board meeting for a decision. (EC)

People living in the house (four bedrooms): wife, husband, five children including an infant, wife's mother, wife's younger brother. Wife's mother has a room downstairs.(AC)

"We're doing good here. ...The schools are all right. ...They're treating me good. I have a lot of friends at school. I like my teachers, they listen to me." (MY)

6. Being Away from Home

Humbling experience – after being independent all my life, “To have to rely on complete strangers for your next bite of food is hard” (cries) "In some respects, it's pretty good -- it's a beautiful state, wonderful people." (SG)

“Like a fish out of water” - (SW)

"I miss home but it's so wonderful here. We have all we've needed" - "My sons have simplified thoughts as far as wants and needs....have intensified value of family." (EK)

Said children were affected worse. 16 year-old daughter tried to commit suicide. - "Home is more than the house you live in" - (JC)

"It's different; we've all had so many changeseverything is dysfunctional." - Four year old is very shy. "Early on, when we talked about it, we couldn't talk without crying." (KC)

"Like standing in quicksand." (SB)

Hardest part is the lack of transportation and getting kids to school and work as there is practically no public transportation here. Although she was working full time back in Louisiana, she is enjoying being able to spend more time at home and they are slowly getting to know people at the Winn-Dixie (where her son works) at the bank and at church. The people are friendly here. (LL)

"Birmingham is home -- north Birmingham. (EC)

"It's hard. We are New Orleanians to the bone. We were surrounded by family members in NO. "The children have had a very difficult time; they were "traumatized" in their first school setting so the mother took them out of school. They won't take baths (scared of the deep water) but will take showers. They were throwing up several weeks after the storm. (AC)

7. Local Treatment

Churches 4 Lion's Club 1 Salvation Army 3 Red Cross 3 Government Agencies (all)

Churches brought food and home supplies to Oak Mountain. Set up a store where everything was free. FEMA trailers came with no kitchen equipment, that was all donated by churches and individuals in AL. By coincidence 80% of evacuees at Oak Mountain were from St. Bernard's Parish. Mostly Baptist churches have helped; disappointed in the Catholic churches as family is Catholic (KC).

Government Agencies are unbelievable, the bureaucracy, "It is like you are doomed before you begin" - (SG) - Too much red tape with FEMA (SW)

FEMA made father-in-law, who was totally dependent on them, to leave Oak Mountain. They couldn't leave because their son was in school. FEMA employee told her husband "I guess you will have to decide who is more important, your father or your son" (DW)

FEMA and Salvation Army - treated like we were applying for welfare or were beggars (JC)

"I am so sick of the word Phase, it is always that phase is over or that phase hasn't begun" Oak Mountain took good care of us, i.e. the regular campers. Then churches brought meals, Salvation Army gave us gas vouchers, gift cards, but didn't see government. (SG)

Treated well - Most help was from the 5th Ave. Bethel Church – they adopted my family – (SW)

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"Wonderful." (EK)

Initially thought it was heaven but as time has gone on, people say "Why don't you go home?" (JC)

"Alabama came through when the government didn't." 80% of people at Oak Mountain State Park were from St. Bernard's Parish, it became a little piece of heaven. There were free groceries and pots and pans in a Pavilion. The FEMA trailers came with no kitchen supplies. Churches and the people of Alabama were wonderful coming out and donating, groceries, supplies and gifts. (DW)

"People of Alabama are wonderful. They provided us with everything we needed." (KC)

"Didn't believe anything the feds told us. Everything was a lie." American people stepped up big time. United Way helped out. "We're on our own now. Don't look for help on the government side. Had trouble getting the right phone number to find housing. "This is the first time I am going to look out for me first, and I hate to do it. " Re: house --- "I like it nice and organized because then your mind is organized."(SB)

Treated well. Son works at Publix at the (new) store on Montevallo Road. He was hired and trained before the store opened. (EC)

"The citizens are beautiful." One woman, in particular, made a difference; "she made Christmas happen." But "help is dying down now." (AC)

8. Taking Care of Oneself & Family

Was on Medicaid and food stamps in MS. Hasn't been able to contact MS resources but has continued to receive "uninterrupted service." (EK)

Financial help from FEMA and Salvation Army (JC). May get on Section VIII housing (JC)

Financial help from Red Cross and food stamps at first. (KC)

"I've kept busy -- it keeps my mind off of that a lot." Only getting FEMA help with the rent. (EC)

Initial help from FEMA was good but the money had to go to replace items they had lost in New Orleans. (AC)

9. Unmet Needs

Cell phone bill, money. " I was told that United Way would pay for phone, mortgage, utilities, car note, car insurance, food, gas, and clothing vouchers. But then they told me that they were only handling families with children. Then they said to come in for a 9:00 o'clock appointment. But then

they said they weren't doing that 'phase' yet. Gave us bank cards but they didn't work. Took two weeks to get a PIN number. Then had to go to Traveler's Aid for gas vouchers. FEMA representative ignored me. I filed a complaint against her. The Caring Center at the Baptist Church gave us a haircut, food and clothing vouchers." Voc Tech, is supposed to help me get back in school. Have two degenerated discs in my back. Can't work now but can go to school. (SG)

Counseling, home church "Busy rebuilding and not socializing"; son needs pediatrician and dentist (EK)

Problem: keep utilities paid. Need to reapply every three months for assistance. "Cannot have full-time job and still do the things you need to do to get yourself back on your feet." (JC)

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Get a FEMA trailer in LA to go home to. "Need FEMA in LA to work with FEMA in Alabama. They don't communicate -- it's almost heartless.... People getting FEMA trailers at home can't use them because no electricity for 2-3 months." (KC)

"I need furniture." (SB)

Needs help with the light bill. Elizabeth was on the budget plan but it [the cost] has jumped up three times. She is not satisfied with repairs on the apartment but she still has to pay the rent on the 3rd. "Seems wrong." (EC)

Current needs are: money, a job, counseling for the whole family, the children's birth certificates and vaccinations so they can enroll in school. "We need more help than what is offered." (AC)

10. Personal, Spiritual, Religious Beliefs that have helped

Rapper T.I.'s song "Motivation" - "*can't make me suffer, just make me tougher*" (PD)

"Relying on Jesus Christ, that is my rock" – SW

"My faith in humanity is restored" - "They have opened their hearts up and poured their heart out." - Was fearful of the unknown but had a peace that God was going to guide them through it. (EK)

"God and my passion to get back home." (JC)

"Every time I prayed, God answered my prayers" (DW)

Didn't really address spiritual beliefs. Talked about values of hard work, family closeness, appreciation for others going out of their way to help. (KC)

"We believe in the Lord, we are Catholics." (AC)

"God helps those who help themselves." "If your ship comes in and you never go to the dock, then how do you know it's come in?" Prayer works and it is powerful. Prayed for a job and found one that came with a room -- night security guard." (SB)

"My belief in God, in justice." "God made me mean for a reason. I've always been too stubborn." I believe in my country, disappointed in my leaders." "I truly believe God doesn't put any more on you that you can handle." (SG)

Elizabeth has been a Baptist her whole life and is planning to reinstate her membership in the Peace Baptist Church on Fourth Avenue. "It had to be God that saved me. Man didn't do it." (EC)

11. Poverty, Race, Class - How did it affect you?

"It is political, whoever declares a mandatory evacuation must pay for it" -

"Two kinds of people didn't leave – (1) those who didn't have the resources and needed to protect what they have and (2) the looters" "More of a poverty issue than a race issue" (SG)

"People could not leave for lack of resources" (SW)

"No one wanted us", she had cousins who stayed and had guns put in their faces and said "we thought they were going to kill us" (SW)

"The local government and federal officials had ignored problems of poverty in LA so long."

The problems in MS were just as devastating but with more racial boundaries in MS. In MS., the gambling revenue helped people to fortify and created more togetherness." (EK)

"I would do away with civil rights. We were better off without integration -- it gave a false hope." (JC)

"I don't think color has anything to do with it -- I think it is how you act." She noted that there are no problems at Oak Mountain: "We're all in the same boat; the kids all play together." "People in St. Bernard's Parish were on their own -- nobody rescued them from their rooftops but they got hit the hardest from the hurricane. St. Bernard's folks did it themselves." (KC)

National Guard treated us like the Taliban, and worse, just like immigrants. (SB)

"I don't think that's right because everybody got the effect of the storm and should be treated equally." (MY)

"Things I saw there -- they could have done more and better. Turned away people who needed help. They say not but race was a factor." Elizabeth guessed that 20% of the people on the overpass were white and they seemed to get more attention than the African-Americans. (EC)

"I believe that prejudice exists." Two examples in a Winn-Dixie in an almost all white neighborhood: 1) mother was accused of wanting to steal money from the Coke machine when she was trying to retrieve her lost money; 2) at the same Winn-Dixie, they were treated rudely by the Western Union staff -- a family member had wired some money; interviewee had identification number but the WU office still gave them a very hard time. They eventually were able to receive the money. Husband objected to the word 'refugee.' "I am an American citizen. " Interviewee noted that had another part of the Ninth ward been flooded, a richer part, "things might be different." She also said that it was the combination of being poor and black that was the problem. (AC)

12. Rising out of Poverty, What makes it difficult?

Greed- those who have don't want to help those who don't have - SW

Lack of self-confidence, fear of the unknown, situational depression. "We all have mental limits." (EK)

"Lack of relationship with God to have faith to hope for better." (EK)

"The obstacles faced by blacks are not faced by others. Example: At Mardi Gras, you have to stand next to white people to get trinkets." "Poverty breeds poverty - we are not over the effects of slavery." (JC)

"As far as the (public housing) projects in New Orleans, they never had a job, never had to pay for anything -- why would they want to go out and get a job now?" Talked about cycles of poverty breeding poverty, lack of motivation (KC)

"I have to get out there and struggle. In a rocket ship, 80% of energy is expended just to get off the ground. When in survival mode, must wait to get the money in order to get off the ground. We're in a spend-spend-spend mode in our society. You can't win in that mode. You have to spend wisely. Some spent money foolishly but vast majority holding on tight." (SB)

"I really don't know. Maybe the job situation. New Orleans was closing down --people didn't have jobs. Just give me the opportunity and I'll get out of it [poverty]." Elizabeth said that there are too many young people on welfare and that they should get jobs. She knows of people who got their GED and then never tried to get a job. (EC)

Husband said "you need to move around people who have jobs." (AC)

13/14 Race, Class, Inequality before Katrina

Race was not the issue (SW)

"I struggle because I didn't pursue higher education at an earlier age." - "Her kids were teased because of her socio-economic status. (EK)

"It's not blacks; it's trashy white people hanging out around convenience stores." (KC)

"Racism was rampant but subtle. I was more accepted by the whites than the blacks or creoles. I would be hired by the owner and then get fired by personnel because people don't want you to give suggestions. I believe in working smart and hard." (SB)

Husband has experienced harassment by the New Orleans Police Dept., even by "black cops." (AC)

15. How to Reduce or Eliminate Poverty

"I believe in my country but am disappointed in my leaders" - "Better Government – WE NEED A NEW PRESIDENT - (SW)

Socialized medical care; quit taking funding from the schools. "Honor education in this country." - "Let people worship quit making poverty sound like such a bad thing (EK)

"Don't know if it can be done in U.S. Need working class in capitalist system." She is trying to start an organization called New Orleanians Rebuilding New Orleans. (JC)

"Work." Reduction of government waste/dishonesty/corruption. "My husband worked since he was 13... I worked, too. We're angry, we're all angry. We're all victims." When she went home over spring vacation, she said the politicians told them not to blame them. But they were living in double-wide trailers. "You see what you see." (KC)

"If you want to keep someone poor, write what people need in a book. Problem with the poor is that they don't read and then don't comprehend. ... If your friends hang out on a street corner, they won't find a job. Hang out with people who have a job. ... Need not just education but reading on a wide variety of subjects, not just magazines or school books. ... Readers are leaders. Get success by selective reading." (SB)

"Send people back to school or for a GED to 'better yourself.' " (EC)

16. How to improve Race Relations

"When Jesus comes, He'll get rid of all that." (EK)

"Don't look at color we need to listen to and understand one another" (SW)

"Need to change hearts. Need to change stereotyping." (JC)

"...story of teacher who said you can't be a doctor. Why don't you want to be a carpenter, Jesus was a carpenter" (JW)

"Race isn't the issue." (KC)

"Racism has to be placed on the table... [Look at the] Willie Lynch practice of pitting all against each other ... Government is spending lots of money and resources to maintain racism. People always find a reason to hate. It's rooted in not liking themselves, always blaming others, never seeing own fault, blame, issue... It's wrong way of thinking to say 'You're a credit to your race.' Wrong way of thinking. Should say 'human' ..need to include all as human." (SB)

"We are all human beings; color shouldn't matter. Color doesn't rub off. People need to 'wizen up' and stop being so stupid. If you don't, you are ignorant." (AC)

17. Taxes

This was a difficult question and wasn't always asked in detail so the results of this are somewhat inconclusive although no one indicated a preference to the first option.

Options:

1. Continue Tax Cuts even for wealthy to stimulate the economy 0
2. Continue Tax Cuts but only for low income and middle class 1
3. No more tax cuts - begin to balance budget - improve programs for health, education, job training, housing, etc. 2
4. In addition to no more tax cuts put some of the taxes back on the wealthiest Americans 2

"People in Washington have no idea about how the poor live. I'm too busy trying to get paid to know about government imperfections. ...Whatever improves education and health is a good tax policy. The rich get the best of this in spite of tax cuts though." (EK)

I guess it depends on if you use it in the right way." (KC)

"Need to increase taxes on those mega-organizations, like Wal-Mart bragging about minimum pay. Then tax the hell out of them.... Need tax relief for middle class and poor." "Have to re-disperse tax money back into the general population." (SB)

"Bush needs to be out of there. " (EC)

She mentioned high sales tax on food and felt that should be eliminated. (LL)

18. Recovery

Gulfport is recovering well (even though our own neighborhood will probably never be rebuilt); it's dangerous south of the tracks. (EK)

"A lot are still without" (SW)

FEMA hired out-of-town contractors, not local people to rebuild (SG)

"Doesn't seem to be." - Faults federal government. Won't make a decision about the levees. (JC)

"Corps of Engineers cleaned up other parishes", but St. Bernard's turned them down, and "now (St. Bernard's) can't account for \$31 million." The parish didn't get any cleanup. (KC)

"Some railroad guys keep me updated on the community. [People] are not making the effort to get things back up, not making an effort to get the community like it was." (EC)

"No, not where I live." (AC)

Recovery is happening between Kenner and New Orleans but not in lower 9th Ward and St. Bernard's Parish -- Blamed herself for living in a bowl and thought that people who live below sea level are "in denial" (LL)

19. What can the country learn?

"How to treat people" (SW)

"Racism and poverty exist in U.S." (JC)

"Don't take any storm lightly" (PD)

That we are all neighbors, everybody is paying for Katrina (SG)

"God made us all different for a reason" (SW)

"This country needs to wake up and get personal with their God." (EK)

"Stop taking things for granted" (JW)

"Never underestimate nature." "Train people properly; you could ask ten different people at FEMA the same question and you would get ten different answers (DW)

"Need to have a system where people who are controlling the funds and providing services need to listen to grassroots people about what needs to be done. There is a disconnect... [When I wrote

that letter].. people said 'the nerve of you to send a letter to the President.'... Why should I go quietly into the night?... Can't go silent. How a lake is filled is one drop of water at a time. " (SB)

"To have a heart." They felt that the rich rappers who were originally locals should have helped. Interviewee said that they were particularly horrified when they were instructed by the governor to write their Social Security numbers on their arms. Husband feels like it is the government's fault: "We should have been out of there before the levees broke. If this storm had been in a foreign country, they would have sent help before the storm." (AC)

"God doesn't mean for us to live below sea level" --- she that it was terrible about the Gretna people being shot at for "just trying to get across the bridge" (LL)

20. How to improve Response to disasters?

Educate ourselves on how to respond. Better preparation (SW)

Get everyone out, whatever it takes. (PD)

“Have the sheriffs organize the next evacuation. They got all the prisoners out in state prisons” (SG)

Government needs to prepare. Military. Countless agencies need to work together (EK)

Coordination of services and preparation. They set you up with caseworkers -- what I want is a trailer at home; they're going to bulldoze my house." (KC)

"No excuses for the government's responses to Katrina. Nothing excuses delay in responding." (JC)

"Cooperative system between all agencies, not only government. ...It is happening now -- everyone needs to be talking and working together"...Red Cross isn't coming to the table with other agencies cause they don't have to cooperate and be accountable....[Then the agencies need to] "tie into the government with check and balance." (SB)

Need to plan ahead and be more able to get people out in the event of a disaster. (EC)

"Take actions ahead of time." (AC)

21. Future Living Plans

Stay here, buy a house (SG)

“Stay here until God guides me” (SW)

Give AL a try for a while. In the next 2-5 years, could either stay here or go back to MS but not as far south. (EK)

Rebuild (JC)

...to be a "famous basketball player, wrestler or rapper." (JW)

Stay here but son wants to return to New Orleans. (DW)

Go back (mother has property there) "but not if it happens again." Would go back for the kids' sake.(KC)

"Move into HUD house" (SB)

"Stay here and get a Habitat house." (EC)

This family doesn't want to go back to New Orleans. "People are getting killed." "Katrina pressure" is what people are experiencing now (the post-storm trauma). (AC)

The have purchased a house and plan to stay in the Birmingham area. (LL)

22. Future for your children?

Children's' future, and hers, is tied to the course and government/charitable agency response to the next big hurricane. (KC)

"They will have to know their God ." Will have to be very resourceful, realistic, able to intellectually care for selves. (EK)

"New Orleans has relied on two things: 1) oil industry, 2) tourists. We've needed to have more sources of income." A couple of them are working there, one can't find work. (SG)

"Some are going back which is good for some but not for others." Some are rebellious -- "I chose not to be a part of that; I want to help those who are poor." (JC)

Elizabeth's children are all doing well; the older ones are employed, the youngest son is in the military in Yorktown, VA. (EC)

Birmingham is a "nice place to raise kids." In NO, a "lot of people don't respect others. (AC)

"I just don't think about the future very much." (MY)

"If you have any extra, just pass it on" (SG)

"That we will learn that we are all neighbors" (JC)

"That there will never be another time that so many will suffer so much for so long." (EK)

"Hope it makes people look again and deeper. Question what it is we need to do from here." (JC)

"If this project comes across where it can help somebody....." She was critical of the press coverage ("the right thing doesn't get played." (KC)

"Hope to have accurate recording of many peoples' stories of what happened, what is happening." Need to know what to do with the money (i.e. spend it more wisely in future disasters). (SB)

"I just wanted to tell my story. Telling helps me cope. Telling lifts the pressure off. Sometimes I wake up crying." (EC)

23. Hopes for what will come out of this project.

"That my voice will be heard" (SW)

"If you have any extra, just pass it on" (SG)

"That we will learn that we are all neighbors" (JC)

"That there will never be another time that so many will suffer so much for so long." (EK)

"Hope it makes people look again and deeper. Question what it is we need to do from here." (JC)

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24. Other Comments

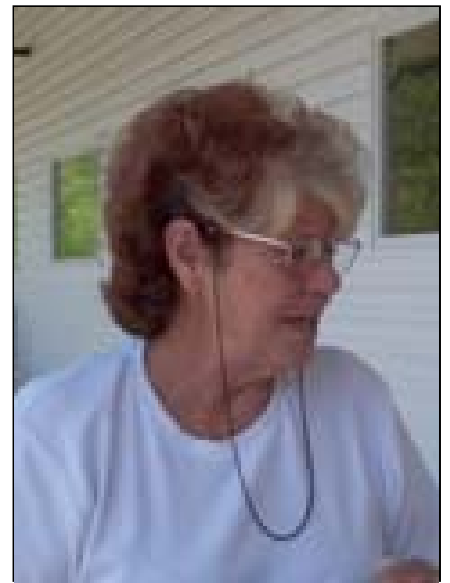
Need "help on spreading the word to go home and rebuild." (JC)

"Just trust in God" (JW)

"People are not being told what's going on... For people who want to return, [they need to know that] political games are being played. " (SB)

"We need some help. We wanted to tell our story. It's not over." (AC)

PHOTOGRAPHS





A Plea to Rebuild New Orleans: A paper by Janice Currie

The following was written by Janice Currie, a life-long resident of New Orleans temporarily living in the Birmingham area. She felt compelled to write a response in February 2006 while planners and civic leaders debated whether or not the city should be rebuilt.

Some ask, "Why rebuild a dying city?" Well, I say we were not all dying. Let us rebuild from inside out. Starting with us; then rebuilding our city. We have to get what we want for ourselves (it seems), then we can fight for what we are rightfully due - A Strong Levee System. I want to go home. I am a schoolteacher. I am a member of the 67% African American population; I am a member of the 70% Black New Orleanians **not** living below the poverty line; I am a member of the approx. 50% of the cities' black homeowners, and although I did purchase homeowners insurance, I belong to the large group of homeowners whose insurance company has **not** paid precedes to after six months past the fact.

This is my response to why Rebuild.

I was born and raised in New Orleans. It is my home. Respect that. I went to school there, I graduated from college there, my job was there, my doctors, church, and favorite shopping places were there. And each of these places represent more than a building; it represents all of my social and emotional ties.

Imagine deciding to relocate for sake of a better job or any other good reason people relocate. You make that with ample time to investigate, as thousands do every year. BUT, suppose you woke up the next morning and you could not go home for Christmas because there is no home to go to. You cannot walk down the streets of the familiar business district and reminisce about when you were there. Forget about the chance of bumping into one of your high school sweethearts or your best friend ever because they are not there. While visiting grave sites of your loved ones does not mean much to me, but to thousands it does. You can't do that any more. No more sifting on the lake front where you and your family spent every 4th of July or drive through the French Quarters when you had out of town guest. Oops, Yes, the French Quarters is still there, but not your people.

I cannot begin to feel the grief stricken hearts who have been separated from their families and even worst lost family members to death. My family was more lucky than many because we left before the storm hit. We were all displaced in the same place, but we are not at home because our lives were larger than our family members and a house in which to live.

Since the hurricane, two of my children decided to relocate to another city other than the one we thought would be a weekend stay. One returned to New Orleans in order to continue his job, but now he is faced with moving his family of four children and a wife to

another location because he can not afford the high rent for the houses that are vacant. My God, that old supply and demand principle is so true.

Two more of my children and a son-in-law immediately returned to work at another branch of their former job, working in this new city that is not New Orleans. Within four months they both purchase another home with their own credit and down payment (minimum help from FEMA). Another of my children has rented a house for herself and her three children, and she is still waiting for FEMA's rental assistance. I was lucky enough to get on Section 8 -for the first time in my life living on public housing assistance- and I only have to pay 306.00 a month because I receive Social Security for my one minor daughter and unemployment from my home state of Louisiana, not to mention the nearly \$4000.00 I had to pay up front under the table because Section 8 would not pay what the landlord was asking. That accounts for the \$4300.00 FEMA has given to me.

I am 57 years old, Fifty-seven years of friends, colleagues, and business acquaintances. All gone. And it doesn't make sense to put it back together? I DON'T AGREE. We need to belong some where.

We don't hear such heartless statements such as why rebuild a city when disaster strikes those living on the countries fault lines, in the peninsular of Florida, or the Mississippi gulf coast. Are the infrequent major storms that affect New Orleans more expensive than those frequent multiple annual storms of Florida or Mississippi? Isn't the wealth of our city worth restoring? Oh, yes, it is; but our not being there will not affect the import/export of oil, or seafood industry that services our rich nation. It will only affect us. If we were to evaluate the pros and cons of where Americans should or should not live in the Beautiful USA, we might be surprised at the number of places it just does not make good sense to live.

To not rebuild New Orleans, means not allowing thousands of families to rebuild their lives. We did not choose to relocate; we were abruptly snatched and dropped off into foreign destinations. We did not have an opportunity to research the schools, job opportunities, or neighborhoods. We felt as if we were experiencing the African Slave trade all over again. Not allowing us to return to the city of our choice seems like a violation of our constitutional rights.

In the words of two of my daughters, "I feel detached, I feel scattered. My friends are in Mississippi, Texas, Connecticut, and even Mexico. I miss my job and I hate finding new doctors. I want things to go back the way they were." Another says, "I feel like a robot. I have a new house and new furnishings, but I don't have 'no' friends. AND I AM TIRED OF GOING TO MAP QUEST EVERYTIME I leave my house. I wish I were home!"

Because of the distress the children suffered, I am teaching several of my family members' kids in my house because they just cannot regroup. They are haunted about the where about of their friends, and they want to go home. One of my nieces said, I even miss the sidewalks."

To not rebuild New Orleans will be a grave injustice to those who lived there and want to return there. I miss New Orleans; I miss home; I even miss those bad little New Orleans kids I once taught. This is why I think they should rebuild New Orleans.