

VOICES FROM THE STORM

you don't know that it's gonna be so far beyond even worrying about that. So we watched the storm and just kind of waited. We weren't enjoying it, but I guess you could say that it was some kind of thrill to be in something that's that powerful.

So then the storm dies down, and people start coming out on their porches and asking how everybody was faring. "Did you fare okay? How'd you do?" Whatever, whatever. The storm, the winds, and rains died down by the afternoon sometime, I believe. Before nightfall, the water was off Dauphine, and it receded all the way back, maybe a block away from my house.

So Dauphine was really the first completely dry street. Parts of Burgundy were dry and parts still had water, but everywhere beyond there had standing water and the water quit receding and it was about a foot deeper for every block you went.

At that point, we still didn't realize that it was everything that it was going to be. I remember at one point when the street finally went dry, we said, "Hooray, Dauphine's dry. We're okay. We're saved."

ABDULRAHMAN ZEITOUN

With the hurricane I was okay. Everything went smooth with the hurricane. Monday, when the wind stopped, I cleaned everything. I see the branches, trees down, water in the street, a couple feet of water. I say, "Okay, it's a good time to go check it out, see what's happening out here."

I decide I will go around in the canoe. Go outside.

I am a contractor and what happened a while ago, one of my customers was moving out of state, and he called me to do some work with his house, and he's selling his things. And I asked him, "What you do with the canoe?" and he said, "I'm selling it if you want it." And I bought it. When I brought it home my wife said, "Crazy, what are you going to do with it?" I used it probably two,

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three times. It's good exercise. It's relaxing too. I just take the kids for, you know, sport. The kids didn't like it.

On Monday, I say it's time to take the canoe for a ride, check out what happened. I take my canoe and go around the block. Two trees were down close to my neighborhood. I just go around the block. I don't wanna go further. I see a few power lines down, and I come back home. Rainy weather, quiet, no more wind, sprinkling lightly. The wind is down. I see no people; it was really quiet. When I got further from my house I see people sitting outside, not many.

Something confused me. I didn't know what happened. I have been here, like I said, from '73 and we had a few floods, but this area never floods. The area where I live now had like two feet of water in '95, and the other one small flood we had came from rain. That day, I saw a flood.

In the late evening time, though, the water start to leave. The water started pumping out. Middle of the night, we have no water in the street anymore. The water is gone. Monday night the water is already out. I sleep quietly Monday night. Everything going well.

I had phone in my house. I called my wife in Baton Rouge and said, "Everything's over. We have luckily no damage." And I said, "If you want to, you can come back."

RENEE MARTIN

That storm spread over us for twelve hours, just tearin' it up. And it got real bad, it got bad, it did. We could hear the roof, and you can hear stuff hitting against the house like flying debris, but you couldn't go outside because you had this stuff flying. It was bad. I was scared. I just stayed in a corner most of the time, praying and hoping that I'd come out alive.

I was in my friend's basement apartment. It was a real low first floor, and I was laying on the sofa bed the next morning after the

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storm died down. I felt wet in the bed. I felt cold and wet. I went to get up and I stepped in water. When I stood, the water was to my knees.

We were running around the apartment trying to save the computer and stuff like that because of all this water. We could hear on the radio they were saying that the main levee had broke, it was flooding, and the water was rising. "You need to get out if you could get out," and stuff like that. I said, "I'm leaving."

The car was covered up with water. It was leaking transmission fluid, gasoline. So the water was oily and dirty, and cold. I had no other choice but to leave because the water was rising and it was filling up. It was getting too deep in the apartment, so I had to leave all that and walk through the water and go to the next building.

I had grabbed a pillow and a blanket and walked through the water, and went to the house next door, which was on the second floor, and they already had left, evacuated. I stayed up there on the porch. All that day I was sitting up there, and you could see the next house over, there was a couple. They had a generator. They had to pick it up off the ground because it was getting wet, and they put it on the porch, and they set up there. Across from us, this lady and her son were on their porch. Everybody was just watching the water. Everybody was asking each other were we all right and stuff.

Then we lost electricity. The phones went off. The electricity went off. I had a little fever because I was still sick. I was going through withdrawals from not taking my medicine, and I wasn't eating.

So Monday night, I stayed on that porch. It was gonna start getting dark, and I was laying on that porch in the dark, and the mosquitoes were biting me. Oooh, I got so many bites.

It was scary. It was dark. You couldn't see anyone. You could hear people hollering, "Help, help." And all you can see is the stars, so many stars in the sky. More than we saw before when we had electric-

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ity. That's the only light we had, the stars. And it was just so close, so close to me. I just laid on the porch and watched the stars.

And to me, this might sound crazy to other people, but to me it was like God looking down at us and talking. We don't hear no voice but he's talking. And to me it was like everything was going to be all right and my baby, my son who had died, is going to be with him. And I always felt like I'm gonna be all right. And I don't have no fear.

FATHER VIEN THE NGUYEN

Monday morning all my computers were gone, so I couldn't retrieve the telephone numbers of my relatives. But I had memorized one of them in California, so I called him to let him know that we are okay, we are still here in New Orleans East. And then I asked for my older brother's number. He had evacuated. So I called him and let him know that we were okay. People were calling in constantly, and I knew that some of the nuns were still here. They were in their house.

I was waiting for the eye of the storm to pass because in our previous experience when the eye passed, things would calm down for fifteen minutes to half an hour. So I waited. Ten a.m., the sky lightened up a little bit, but prior to that it was all dark and windy. There wasn't much rain. The droplets were very small.

Ten minutes later, it got dark again so I called my brother and I asked him, "Where's the eye?" He said, "It just passed you."

So during that time, some more people came in. I knew of more than a hundred who were in the building. But other than that, I knew that there were others at home but I could only take care of those who were here. The sisters came in. They walked through all of the rain, and came in. And they were taking refuge at the house.

So the power of the storm surged through continuously until

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Then my oldest daughter, she walked away around the Superdome and she came back and she said, "Mama, we should move from here to the entrance ramp." And people start saying everybody has to move from the bleachers and go to the ramp 'cause everything was falling. So we moved to the ramp. I got a small place inside on the ramp and I put all my kids in there. There was all full of families, all the ramps.

The storm passed and everything passed and then we was thinking that we was going back home. But it was not like that. They don't let nobody get out the Superdome. Water was through everything. Water was all over.

It was devastating. It was my four kids and my two grandkids in the Superdome. We had only like a change of clothes, just in case, and when we got changed the next day, what was we gonna use the other days? And how we going to wash what we was having on? It's not fair, how we was treated in there.

At first, the first or second day, we had lights. And then after that they cut it off and it was like a backup generator. It was real dark in there. The people was trying to survive in there. They had broken in stores to get bottles of whiskey and stuff. They actually was selling the whiskey for cigarettes, for underwears, for everything. That was like a city with no law in there. I'm talking about the beginning, before the National Guard.

The floor had all kind of situations 'cause they got everybody together. Families, with men by themselves, women by themselves, and kids. I mean, for me, that was terrible. You can't sleep because you're scared your kid's gonna get raped or something.

When I start seeing a lot of men by themselves, I was very concerned 'cause not all minds are good. When I started seeing a lot of people that actually I don't know where they come from, I was worried. I tell you what I was worried about: seeing the men, grown men. If you're a woman and if you don't got no kids, you would be

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worried. Let me tell you the naked truth. Twentysomethings, thirty-something-, fortysomething-years-old men by themselves means something 'cause I think by that age you're supposed to have at least a bird, somebody next to you. My grandma used to say that the lady is different because sometimes the lady's a nun or something. But my grandmama said, by the time the man is thirtysomething or fortysomething years old, he's supposed to have at least a gay guy next to him. But in the Superdome, it was thousands of lonely mens walking around drinking, doing everything. I'm not going name what they was doing. That's not my job. That's the authorities' job, but I can tell you it was out of control. That includes everything.

They got all the bathrooms on the first floor. They was stopped. How? I don't know. It's three women's bathrooms and three men's bathrooms. The whole line was stopped. They cut everything, the water in the whole Dome off. Now what?

They did have a lot of military jeeps with a lot of water. But I don't even know how many thousands of people was in the Superdome. They was giving one bottle per person. They come in the morning and the afternoon, and in between they sent little cars. There was little cars with like ten packers of water and soon as the men walked from the truck four steps, he already was out of water. The people was already getting there. Then we was eating military food.

They was feeding the people like once a day. They got a microwave in the back and then they got food, but it's like dry. It's food that already made and they put it in little sacks. And it's actually good. I'm not going to lie. It's a light-green plastic bag, and you put a little bit of water and it boils and you put it back. And that was amazing. I haven't seen that before in my life.

RENEE MARTIN

The weather was like a tropical breeze blowing. I was cold because

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I was wet. Monday night I had stayed up on the porch until I went to sleep. By the time I woke up Tuesday morning, the water had got higher because we had a breach in the 17th Street Canal, which was like five blocks from where we were.

The water pump cracked. It wasn't working. It was a brand-new water pump that they built, and they didn't have the other water pumps on, which I think there were like seven of them. The brand-new one cracked, so we had so much water. And I didn't know how much higher that water was going to be coming, and when it's dark and you can't see, it's scary looking at that water because the water was too high for me to stand up in and try to walk through.

There were some guys, some people riding around in canoes and small boats rescuing people. It was like private-owned boats, and then they had some like, wildlife officials riding around rescuing people.

They had electricity in some areas because I remember one boat with a man and a dog, and another boat that had three ladies on it, they were saying that they had come all the way from Metairie.¹⁹ And they had heard about the bridge, and they came out to save some people because they heard about it on the news, that it was flooding, and it was still coming up.

I had a big white towel and I was on my porch flagging it and calling for them, "Hey, hey." Finally, a man came and got me. I remember him as "the Man with the Dog." He was a white male, about seventy-five years old with a brown dog. He was like a hound dog.

It had to be like around noontime. I was so happy to be removed from that area because I didn't want to be there another night, in that dark, and getting bit by mosquitoes.

He asked me what I was doing there by myself, why I didn't have nobody else with me, where I came from. I told him the West Bank.

¹⁹ Metairie is a community under the jurisdiction of Jefferson Parish, located west of New Orleans.

He said, "What in the world are you doing over here?"

He picked me up and he put me in the boat, and he picked up a girl, her husband, and her mama.

I was hearing that they opened up the Superdome again. It was forced to be open because there was so many people stranded, didn't have no other choice. They didn't make any kind of arrangements for us to evacuate, so we had no choice. Everybody who stayed home, they knew to go to the Superdome.

They opened up the Superdome for the first time when Hurricane Ivan came in 2004. They opened it at the last minute, but I mean, everybody got in there and everything. The storm passed by, wasn't that bad. But on the way out of the Convention Center and the Superdome, people were coming out with the sofas and the tables and stuff like that, and the mayor really got upset. To me, it was like he said, "I give y'all somewhere to stay and look what y'all did!" That was the truth. That's what I would have said.

So the Man with the Dog took us to the Superdome area, but he couldn't go all the way. They had bodies in the water. They had fish in the water. They had, like, big logs blocking the street, so we had to walk. The water was, like, right over my knees. It had started to begin getting the smell in the water. They had leaking gas in the water from the cars.

It was scary because we had bodies and we had to walk through these bodies, but you had no choice. It was either stay on the boat in the water or walk through all of that and get up on that ramp where everybody else was. And we wasn't the only people. They had lots of people coming from different areas who had tried to survive the storm from home, tried to ride it out. We were all walking from different areas.

I didn't have nothing. All I had was a pillow and a blanket, and by the time I got to the Superdome I didn't have that. I was looking for someone that I know, my family, my kids, but I didn't see

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nobody. All I had was me. I did have a little wallet with my ID just in case. I was thinking, "What if I die? How they gon' know who I am?" So I had my ID, and my Social Security card in my pocket.

When I got to the Superdome ramp, they had so many people out on the ramp and they had so many people inside the Dome that you were trapped. Part of the Superdome roof, it was tore up from the storm. It had rained inside there. It was a mess, they had people that were dying. A lot of them were like children and babies. Well, all ages. A lot of them was overheated or dehydrated. Some needed to be on a machine, like they had people who were diabetic on dialysis. Different situations. And the Superdome wasn't equipped for that kind of stuff. They just opened the doors and let people in.

I couldn't walk too much because it was so packed full of people, and it was pushing and shoving and everybody was panicking, and I didn't want to go too far inside because I didn't wanna miss a ride if a ride came. I was more like on the edge of the ramp where the railings were, so I can see what was going on, you know, see if anybody was coming.

I got to the restroom area and I didn't want to stand there long. You can hear people screaming and hollering. It was a lot of crime, and yelling "help," and people dying. It was crazy. They were doing crazy stuff. They were stealing from each other, fighting, having sex. I felt like we was in a place called Sin City and Satan was going to take us all.

People was pushing and shoving all out on the ramp, as well as inside the Dome because we panicked. We don't know what to do. We don't have no one to organize nothing. We're just on our own and taking our own thoughts on what to do. And you have to fend for yourself because you are in the middle of different things going on, you know?

And me, I was by myself. I mean, I was with a whole lot of people that I didn't know but I wasn't with family or friends. So

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I had to mingle with people that was there, who was trying to do the same thing. It was like we're clinging onto life, so we're clinging on each other. That's all we had. We didn't know each other, but we know we needed to be together because we was all suffering and going through the same thing.

We were dehydrated. They had no changing clothes; I had to stay wet. And I had to wind up sleeping with those clothes on and drying in those same clothes. We couldn't use the bathroom. We didn't have no food. And I started dehydrating real bad. You had children, and the children were like, "I want to eat, I want to eat!" You know, they're starved. You hear little boys, they tell you they wanna eat. They're hungry, and there's nothing to eat.

You have to step over a baby, you gotta walk around a lady who said, "Oh, I want something to drink so bad," and she just lie there and that was it. And people were scared. Some people when they go into stuff like this, it's so hard on them that they start panicking. You know, what can you do but try to assure them that it's gonna be all right? Don't give up. Just hang in there.

After doing that for so many days, a lot of people were dying. I thought I was going to die too because I was sick, and I wasn't using my medicine before I got there. And it went on for three days, four days till when we did get food, we got those MREs, the military-ready food. It was good, but I couldn't hold it down because I had been without food for so long.

ANTHONY LETCHER

It was Tuesday, the second day of the storm. I went to Gentilly, which was higher ground so it was dry on Broad and Michoud. It was hectic, man, everything was going on—looting, robbing, jacking. Man, all kinds of stuff. Brothers walkin' around with Uzis and shit. It was off the chain over there, you dig?

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politicians have been doing what they want to do and getting away with it for so long now, it's the normal thing to do.

Like I said, we met with resistance. We stayed up on the bridge for awhile, but we had reservations about trying to cross it again because they had already told us if they seen us again they'd shoot. They had police all over the place. They had military all over the place. FEMA was all over the place. And nobody was doing anything to help us. They were just there to keep us in line. They boxed us in that city. They wouldn't let us out. They said if we tried to get out, they'd shoot to kill.

Let me tell you something. That is nothing new for New Orleans. The police been doing that. The police has been doing that. And I hate to say it, but the black police are just as bad as the whites. That's the way I read it, anyway.

RENEE MARTIN

Everybody in the Dome was mad.

The mayor wanted people to evacuate, but a lot of us couldn't evacuate. I mean, everybody don't own a car. Everybody didn't have means for transportation, no money to travel. But the city of New Orleans has cabs. They have schoolbuses, charters. They have public service buses. They have planes, trains, boats. If it's mandatory, and he knew the city of New Orleans is under a Category 5, he should have thought about all those transportation, and let those people out. *You* got out, so you should've helped us out.

My sister lives on the West Bank in Stonebridge, and she said that the Sheriff's Department came around and were able to knock on each door, and took them on buses to where it was mandatory. They went house to house and moved them. But look at the area she stays in. Her husband, he is a seaman. He works on ships. She is a manager of the Jazz Fest. She books concerts for Jazz Fest.

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Our area didn't get that. We just know from TV, on the news, that it's mandatory, must leave now. How you gonna leave if you don't have no money? Even if you have a car, if you don't have no money, you can't get no gas. So if you have five dollars to buy gas, you can't take a chance and leave with five dollars.

So you gonna have to fight it out. And that's why a lot of us got stranded. They planned the evacuation for some areas like I said, but they didn't plan it for a lot of other areas. It made me feel like a conspiracy at the time. It's a racist thing. All of us was overlooked. God didn't overlook us. We went through it.

I think some people look at it in a spiritual way. Some people look at it like Democratic and Republican way. Doesn't matter how you look at it. To me, you can look at it all ways, different ways. I'll never wanna stay like that in my life again.

They government's like, "New Orleans has all these low-income people keeping us down. We have to have so many tour sites, and get money in, keep the city going. So we're just gon' target this area here, and let the water come in, and don't even try to help anybody. Just open the Dome for 'em, and there you go."

Even while we was there for them days, that's too many days for people to—especially babies and elderly or sickly people—be stranded for that many days with no food, no water, no proper care for sickly people, elderly people. If you're gonna open up the Dome, make sure you have the equipment there because you have to think about different people with asthma, you know, different problems.

It's a horror story, really.

It goes from being a storm by Mother Nature, or an act of God, into a horror. To me, it's a combination of having an act of Mother Nature and then an act of man.

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you went toward Claiborne, you had some issues with water, and the Superdome would have been over that way and a little to the south, so I kept on Decatur across Canal. I can remember on the left was the Morial Convention Center, and there were lawn chairs, just these folding chairs everywhere. You had to imagine thousands of people having been there for many, many days, for a whole week, and by this time they were all in the Dome or evacuated, so I just saw litter and litter and more of it.

I was very angry. See, at any given moment, you had a stagnant area possible on the West Bank. There was no water there. How many buses do we have in the United States? How many hundreds? Let's say the presidential family and retinue just happened to be in the area, and got trapped into such an environment. I don't know how different it would have been but I bet the whole hacienda and the whole ranch that it would not have been even close to the same. They would've gone beyond hell and high water, literally, to change things. The military would be out. They have sea planes, they have all kinds of hovercraft and seacraft, amphibious craft. Everyone would have been gone from New Orleans.

When I got to La Place, I got down and made my telephone calls, told my relatives where I was.¹² They all breathed a sigh of relief; many of them thought I was gone. Many of my friends thought I was gone. They thought I was on the second floor of the room surrounded by eight or ten feet of water, had to be plucked out by the coast guard or somebody, National Guard in helicopters, but I allayed their fears.

I went to Baton Rouge, just holed up in Baton Rouge, did not really bother with church authorities. I guess I should have been more in touch but they sounded so discombobulated, and I said, "I think what I need is a break, which is what I took."

¹² La Place is a suburb of New Orleans, located to the west of the city.

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I didn't even think of celebrating Mass anywhere. On Sunday, I put a sport shirt on, and I went to the church almost at the farthest point from where I was. And every Sunday, I would just go over and just sit back and just enjoyed being a plain, lay person and listening to the Sunday sermon, throwing a few dollars in.

I had this time and it's God-given time in a way. I've been doing a book on the history of St. Augustine Church in Tremé, so I figured, "I'll go in for the kill." I said, "I will finish this," and I finished the book. There was only one problem. After I finished the book, somebody wrote a last chapter to the book. Archbishop Hughes decided there has to be one last chapter to the book, so he wrote it.

RENEE MARTIN

When I left the Houston Astrodome, it was Tuesday, September 6. I had left by myself because other days, everybody was walking and trying to get apartments and stuff like that, and it's very hard when it's two, three hundred people, and they're only giving out maybe a hundred apartments. So I went by myself and caught the bus and went up down here at West Oaks Nursing Home in Houston. I went there and I told them I was down from New Orleans, and do they have any job openings. And the girl said, "I believe they do have a opening in housekeeping."

I said, "Well, I have my CNA [Clinical Nursing Assistant] license, and I'm hoping to do something with that."

She said, "Well, I don't think they have any openings right now either. We can give you a call."

I'm like, "Má'am, I will take the housekeeping right now because I live in the Astrodome."

She was like, "Wait a minute, let me call a supervisor."

And she did, and she came, the supervisor came. She said, "Can you get here at six in the morning?"

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I said, "Better than that, I'll just stay here till six in the morning. I don't have nowhere to go." So they talked to the administrator and she offered me to stay at her place, and then other people's coming in, and everybody wanted to see who I was. Everybody wanted to take me to their house. Even the owners of the facility, they came. They wanted to meet the lady from New Orleans. It was something.

But what had happened is that the administrator and the accountant, she said, "Well, she needs a place, an apartment, that she can get to work," which was true because they had hired me. Her name is Darcy. She's real cool. And the accountant, her name is Jenny. So they had some apartments right across the street from my job. They gave me a check to go pay for this apartment, and I got it the same day I went in there, and I took a bath. Ohhh, I went to sleep that night. I slept so good. I actually slept.

It had carpet, and nobody was there but me. I didn't have to worry about getting raped or getting beat up while I'm asleep. Nobody's stealing from me. And I slept so good. And I got up that morning, I washed up and I put the same clothes back on. I went across the street to my job. They had bought me two uniforms. Two uniforms, and they brought me to Wal-Mart to buy some tennis shoes. So it feels nice.

They helped me way before I got assistance from FEMA. I didn't really have to get anything because my job. They paid my rental deposit, and then they helped me with my washer, dryer, dishes, pots and glasses, everything. Before I got my bed, they gave me a mattress so I could get on the mattress and sleep. It felt so good. They're the family at my job, the people I work with. They've been real good. I came right from the Astrodome, went right in there and got a job. And from there, they helped me with everything else. And the dietitian—her name is Mary—she used to see me every day. And then I was eating too. Ooooooh. I was wearing a size three, and I'm wearing a size seven now.

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They call me Katrina. "Hey, Katrina!" At work, they call me Katrina. It never bothers me. I would rather talk about it because I don't like to hold stuff in. I talk about it, but when I talk about it, we start cryin'. I'm like, "I didn't want to make you cry."

"But it's so sad," they say.

That's why they call me Katrina. Katrina at work. But it's okay. I had started working on September 7. I used to cry, "I don't know where none of my family are. I'm all by myself." You know, you feel lonely when no one around. And then at times I was sad because when you wake up, and you in one place, and you wake up and you somewhere else, and you look at the reason why you're somewhere else is because of a catastrophe or whatever, it's like a nightmare. And you don't know where nobody at. It's hard. And if you gotta go to hell, you want somebody to be with you. You don't wanna go through all of that by yourself, but I had to. I didn't have nobody to cling to.

I had gone on the Internet at the Astrodome. The Red Cross put me on there, my name and stuff like that. And then when I moved and got my job, I went over again and put more information like my name, my address, and phone number.

My birthday's on September 10. The nurses gave me a birthday party—I'd never had a birthday party before—and the hospital gave me that day off. When I got home, the phone rang. It was my sister. It was my older sister, and she said she was at the Drury Inn. And I'm like, "I don't know where that is. And she said, "I was comin' to get you from the Astrodome 'cause I had heard you were in the Astrodome." I said, "I was, but I'm not in there now. I'm in an apartment. My address here."

She's like, "You got a job? You got an apartment?"

I said, "Yeah."

She said, "How'd you get a job and an apartment in the middle of all of this?"

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I said, "Well, I do," I said, "but I'm off today. You can come get me?"

She said, "Yeah, but I have to get the address."

And she said she was gonna look for it, the directions, off the computer. She called me back, she said, "Come here. You're right down the street from me."

I said, "Is that true?" and I come to find out she was off Highway 6, right on the other side of I-10. And she came and got me. And when she came and got me, she had my mom, my grandson, my daughter, my nieces. And she had cake and ice cream. So they gave me a little party.

They opened the door, everybody like, "Surprise! Happy Birthday!" I just stood there, and I just cried. I was happy too at the same time. After we ate ice cream and cake, we had went to the Drury Inn on Highway 6. It was the whole family, and on my birthday.

And I'll never forget that birthday. I remember all those dates. Katrina was August 29, and the Superdome was September 4. Getting my job, September 7. And my birthday, and reuniting with my family, September 10.

RHONDA SYLVESTER

On Tuesday, about four days after we got to Houston and checked into a hotel, we looked for an apartment. They had everybody tell you you could get these rent-free apartments, no deposit.

My sister's son used to work for Budget Rent-a-Car in Baton Rouge, so they accommodated him. We had one car when we got out here. Everybody was lookin' for an apartment. I didn't have no money. I was waitin' on my paycheck to come in—we was supposed to get paid the week of the storm—so we didn't have no money.

We had found these apartments. They wanted \$199 to move in. In the process of me goin' to move in, a man from Lazy Brook Hospital

THE WEEK AFTER

Church in Houston called me on the phone, and I'll never forget his name: Abraham. He said, "Rhonda, I have an apartment complex that I wanna give you and your relatives apartments free of rent for three months."

No I came over and come see the apartment. I filled out all the papers and the lady, she told me, "Well, you can move in Saturday." She said I'm a have the apartment so we moved in. They were so nice. They had gave us three beds. One full-size bed and two queen-size beds. Oh it's nice and quiet. It's a two-bedroom apartment, one and a half bath, living room, kitchen, and a dining room, which is just nice and it's comfortable.

If we needed to go places, the church people used to come and get us and bring us to places. They welcome us in. They welcome us. And I didn't deal with different organizations; I just struck with the church down there 'cause if I deal with other organizations that means I was gonna be knockin' somebody else. That organization would help somebody else. I just deal with the church. Whatever they gave us, I accepted that down there. They used to give us ten dollars' worth of quarters a week to wash our laundry. Detergent, though. They really blessed us. Clothes unlimited for the kids.

It didn't matter to them what color we was. Believe it or not, we was the only black-American, African family that come close to them. It ain't that they didn't want to help nobody else. Nobody else didn't reach out to them. We reached out to them and they supported us for who we was, and they're a very loving, Christian family there. Very supportive. And you can go to 'em for any problem, anything. You can go there and talk to them if you need to get on the computer, if you need to take care of business, they're 100 percent behind you. And they didn't even much know us. They didn't even much know our background; they didn't know nothing about us. But they accepted us. And that was, I believe, that was love. That was true love.