

Hurricane Katrina helped me find my purpose in life

By DeAnna Tisdale

Jackson Advocate Associate Publisher

It's hard to think that it's been an entire decade since Hurricane Katrina, the travesty that devastated coastal Mississippi, Louisiana and Alabama and whose affects were felt throughout these states. Hurricane Katrina is also responsible for exposing the reckless negligence that caused the levees to break in New Orleans, Louisiana.

The horrific aftermath of the levee failure ripped apart at the seams of racial progress in America. New Orleans natives were called refugees in their own country. People desperately waited for help that didn't come. Thousands of people were herded into the Superdome; some would never again leave. Image upon each dreadful image was shown to America and we are still recovering. We are still in the aftermath.

There are some moments in history that are unforgettable. I'm sure most people remember where they were when Hurricane Katrina hit. For me, I had just started my sophomore year at Tougaloo

College. My close friend Wallace Jackson and I had taken a back-to-school trip to New Orleans the week before Hurricane Katrina hit. We met up with my high school friend Natalie Cooley, who was attending Dillard University at the time, and enjoyed a day of shopping and delicious Cajun cuisine. It would have been a different trip if we had gone a week later.

Upon returning to Jackson, weather reports were ominous with news on the impending hurricane. Tougaloo cancelled classes, and I holed myself up in my apartment alone. But I remember being more worried about my mom and dad and my friends who were still in the college dorms. As the storm progressed, I sat on my couch, glued to the TV screen. I called and checked up on friends and family. I was scared that my power would go out, but, by the grace of God, it didn't.

By now, I had heard word from some of my friends that Tougaloo's dorms had no power. I told them that, if they felt like weathering the storm, they would have safe

refuge at my place. Over the next few days, I had between 7-10 friends staying with me. My mom, dad and the *Advocate* staff worked in my 2nd bedroom to get the paper out that week because the office didn't have power, nor did my parents' house.

I remember the first time I left the apartment to attempt to drive to get food for my friends. I could barely drive down the street. There were trees, debris, and all sorts of things blocking the way. It was also a nightmare to try to get gas. People sometimes had to wait 3-5 hours. It was like a scene from a post-apocalyptic movie. But again, God's grace and mercy carried me through.

Furthermore, I realized that there is always a silver lining. Through this seemingly dismal condition, I unknowingly gained more insight about who I am and what my purpose is in life. It only came to my mind when the opera director at Boston Conservatory asked me last year, "What is your mission statement for your life?" He wanted each person in the

class to write a statement and a description of what we believed our purpose in life was; something that may have included singing but would encompass so much more and be a driving force in whatever we did in our lives.

The thing that I realized was that through this storm, that affected so many people's lives, I wanted to be a healing light to others. The power in my apartment didn't stay on so that I could enjoy sitting on my couch, relentlessly watching the news alone. It stayed on so that I could help my friends who were in need. It stayed on so that the news vital to our community could still reach those who value it.

Though we are still witnessing the affects of Hurricane Katrina, I know that all who made it out of it are much stronger than before. We have cried together. We have shared our stories. We have lent a helping hand. And we will triumph together. Ten years from now, our wounds may be barely visible and we will be well-equipped for any other storm, literal or figurative, that comes our way.



Hurricane Katrina has helped DeAnna Tisdale realize her purpose in life — to lend her voice to the world through opera. Here she is performing in Halifax, Nova Scotia as Anna Murrant in *Street Scene*, written by Kurt Weill and lyrics by Langston Hughes. Her son, Willie, gives her a kiss before dashing off to school.



Lakandra Johnson



Sherita Fletcher Miller and Mark Owens

Hurricane Katrina chronicles 10 years later

By Meredith C. McGee

Jackson Advocate Contributing Writer

Ten years ago on August 29, 2005, Hurricane Katrina killed around 2,000; displaced one million Alabama, Louisiana, and Mississippi Gulf Coast residents; flooded 80 percent of New Orleans, destroying property; and changed lives forevermore.

The government's disaster response from the president to the mayor of New Orleans was criticized. America was alarmed by visual footage of blacks on rooftops, in boats, and scrambling for safety.

Kenya West said the now famous quote, "George Bush doesn't care about black people." The media was accused of dubbing black families as looters, and white families in sur-

vival mode looking for food.

Third ward hurricane survivor Johnny Bailey said, "Ray Nagin [former mayor of New Orleans] didn't do enough to get us out the city." The U.S. Coast Guard rescued over 33K people from New Orleans. Ray Nagin and Gov. Kathleen Blanco were unprepared to lead disaster efforts.

Johnny, who lived with his daughter, two sisters, two nephews, and niece, recalled, "I was uptown when the storm hit." They had planned to ride the storm out, and didn't believe they were in eminent danger until it was too late. After being warned to evacuate by city government he admitted saying, "I ain't going nowhere."

On the 28th of August in

See *Chronicles* on 8B

By Alice Thomas-Tisdale

Jackson Advocate Publisher

They came wearing slippers, curlers in their hair, and a few dollars in their pockets believing their narrow escape from New Orleans and the Mississippi Gulf Coast was a day event. Those who found themselves in Jackson, MS, with no possibility of returning to their homes anytime soon, quickly found themselves in need of food, shelter, clothing, including medical stockings and custom sized bras, birth certificates, prescription drugs, transportation, phone service, being acclimated to the city and, long term, educational services, jobs/business opportunities, and permanent housing for themselves and their children.

The Red Cross immediately stepped in, so did the Mississippi State Conference NAACP, which had the best statewide organization to assist Hurricane Katrina

survivors. Councilman Kenneth I. Stokes called the Jackson Advocate to alert us to the fact that several families from New Orleans were being evicted from a local hotel and had nowhere to go. He is the reason the Jackson Advocate initially got involved.

Also on the front line were numerous organizations, local churches, hospitals, clinics, pharmacies, schools, businesses, city, county and state services that stood up like champions to assist those devastated by the costliest disaster in American history.

The Jackson Advocate quickly realized the problem was too great for it to solely meet the needs of hundreds of survivors calling and coming by the office. Ending the help was not an option so it created NEIGHBORS, an acronym for Nation's Evacuees In Good Hands with Benevolent Outreach Services.

Through the grace of God, the Jackson Advocate contributed thousands of dollars to Katrina survivors, yet funds quickly ran out. However, with the assistance of the United Auto Workers, which contributed \$40,000 to the project, NEIGHBORS was able to continue to provide housing assistance, a link between Louisiana and Mississippi authorities to retrieve birth certificates and other documents required to receive services, a partnership with the Red Cross to extend accommodations at local hotels, food vouchers, laundry services, permanent housing, furniture, appliances, transportation, garden and carpentry tools, travel funds, prescription drugs for those with chronic illnesses, school registration assistance, job readiness, classes on Jackson history and so many other services beneficial to easing the burden of starting over.

No salaries were paid and all overhead costs and supplies were provided by the Jackson Advocate, which efforts were recognized locally and nationally. The SCLC Women awarded NEIGHBORS its Courage Award in 2006. The State of Mississippi presented a resolution thanking NEIGHBORS for its volunteerism, as did the Jackson City Council. *ESSENCE* Magazine also thanked the organization for its outreach.

Ten years later, many Hurricane Katrina survivors from New Orleans and the Mississippi Gulf Coast still remain in the Jackson area. Those who have returned to their homes are still grateful for the services they received from Jackson, MS.

All Hurricane Katrina volunteers should celebrate their willingness to step up to the plate and hit a home run for those devastated by Hurricane Katrina.

Katrina, still affecting people after 10 years

By Ivory Phillips

Jackson Advocate Contributing Editor

Many people know the facts regarding Hurricane Katrina. This devastating storm raged on the Gulf Coast and then north eastward from August 23-31, 2005. It was most destructive, being responsible for at least 1833 fatalities and over \$108 billion in property damage. This hurricane, which reached speeds up to 174 miles per hour, destroyed lives and property in the Bahamas, Cuba and Florida. But it inflicted the greatest damage on Mississippi and Louisiana.

As a matter of fact, most of the news centered on New Orleans. That is the case because New Orleans was the largest population center to be affected. But it was also because in addition to the storm itself, New Orleans' levee system did not hold, releasing untold amounts of water from Lake Pontchartrain. As the levees broke and the flooding ensued, the city, which had a population of nearly 500,000 was reduced to merely 384,000, more than 100,000

people fleeing to other cities, towns and states.

The lack of prompt and proper response from the George W. Bush administration became quite the talk of the nation. It was almost rivaled by the corruption which followed, as business and political leaders took advantage of the storm to line their pockets.

The tragic episode was marred with racism in terms of who was rescued and at what speed; who made money; who was able to rebuild and who was left with nothing. When the levees gave way, it reminded many people of the 1927 Flood when the poorer neighborhoods were deliberately flooded in order to spare the wealthier communities. That may be a story unto itself, but it certainly escaped few who were victimized in 2005, when the levees broke. There are still some pending court actions, wherein government entities were sued over the failure of the levees and the subsequent losses that people suffered.

Many of us know people who fled from New Orleans when Katrina

struck and the levees broke. Some returned home; many made their homes elsewhere. This forced migration is a major part of the ongoing Katrina story.

Before Hurricane Katrina there were 323,000 African Americans in the city. Today there are just 223,000. That is a net loss of 100,000. On the other hand, the white population is down by just 11,500. New Orleans has gone from being an overwhelmingly black city to one that has only a slight black majority. Not only that, as a result of Katrina, New Orleans has an elected white mayor for the first time in more than a generation. The City Council and many other top officials are now white, as opposed to black. New Orleans, which had aspirations of catching up with Atlanta in terms of black political development now sees itself fading into the background. A natural disaster has done what politics could not do once the civil rights movement had opened the city democratically.

This shift in the racial complexion of the city has been even more

dramatically reflected in its economic complexion. Middle class blacks have lost a great deal of ground; poorer blacks who had very little to start with are now living on next to nothing. To tourists and other visitors, the city of New Orleans has made an almost miraculous recovery. But to many black residents conditions have not improved at all.

The school situation is symptomatic of the city itself. Public school children are now divided into those who attend the New Orleans Public Schools, those in Orleans Parish Schools and those in the Recovery School District. All three systems are suffering more than would a strong, united one. In other words, the state of Louisiana has muddled the waters in much the same manner that the state of Mississippi hopes and has attempted to do, weakening and eventually destroying the public schools as we know them.

The writer admits that the majority of this article deals with New Orleans as opposed to the entire Gulf Coast region that was affected by Hurricane

Katrina. But this is the case because, in many ways New Orleans is being used as a pattern by conservative politicians for what can be done with and in other areas. The same could not be done for a Gulfport or Pascagoula Mississippi. But if the shoe can be made to fit in New Orleans, it can be scaled down for the smaller areas. Mississippi's Gulf Coast was not affected in the same manner as was New Orleans, primarily because of its different geography. Similarly, its racial make-up was different. Its recovery, therefore, has been different. But the focus is and has been on New Orleans, as noted above.

Politically, economically and educationally, Katrina is still with many New Orleanians after 10 years. Furthermore, if people like Bobby Jindal, Phil Bryant, and even Mitch Landreau can have their way, things in the future will look much more like they did in the early 1970s than just before Katrina and its destruction. It is more the kind of city that they prefer. The resurrected New Orleans is a one-sided renaissance.