

*Rebuilding,  
Remembering,*



*and Rewriting  
St. Bernard Parish*

*2008-2009*



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St. Bernard Parish*

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*Written and Published in connection with  
The Center's Innovative Teaching Initiative Grant Project  
at Southeastern Louisiana University*



*To Mr. Warner, who is such a beautiful part of St. Bernard Parish,  
and to Gabrielle Gettys and Jeremy Steeghs,  
who will be missed greatly by our community.*



*Rebuilding, Remembering, and Rewriting  
St. Bernard Parish*

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# Editor's Note

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## Disclaimer

Views expressed in *Rebuilding, Remembering, and Rewriting St. Bernard Parish* are those of the authors and are not intended to represent the official views of the administration, faculty, staff, students, and Writing Center of Southeastern Louisiana University and/or Chalmette High School.



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## ~Introduction~

*The students who have compiled the journals, poems, and narrative essays in this text were all part of a ninth grade level Basic Composition course at Chalmette High School. Chalmette High School is located in St. Bernard Parish, Louisiana, which is a suburban community adjacent to New Orleans that experienced total devastation during the flooding after Hurricane Katrina in 2005. After serving as a shelter of last resort during the hurricane, Chalmette High School became one of the first public buildings in the area to rebuild, opening its doors in mid-November to students in grades K-12. The determination exhibited by the School Board and faculty at Chalmette High ignited hope and a flurry of rebuilding in the community. It was thought that if the children were not afraid to come back, if the children would fight to come back, then the entire parish would figuratively breathe again. And it did.*

*Because of the challenges that the area faced (and continues to face) as the school system works to get back on its feet, there have been a variety of people who have reached out to the district and sought to be involved in our rebuilding process in some way. One particular group of people who have taken an interest in our school and students is a small group of professors from Southeastern Louisiana University.*

*Drs. Cindy Elliott, Jayetta Slawson, and Frances Wood wrote a Service-Learning grant that allowed students at the university level to correspond with students in two of Chalmette High's Basic Composition classes. The goals of the grant were to improve writing at the high school level, preserve cultural and historical information about St. Bernard Parish, and allow collegiate students to improve their own writing processes through rigorous editing.*

*To achieve this goal, the ninth grade students responded to a series of writing prompts. The theme of all the prompts was centered on the parish in which our high school is located, as preservation was the focus of the grant. Students sent their work via the Internet to the Southeastern cohort, who had received training in the Southeastern Writing Center. Then, the teacher education candidates at the university edited work for strengths and weaknesses based on writing traits, such as content, voice, organization, and conventions. The Basic Composition students engaged in a continuous dialogue with the Southeastern students to produce quality final drafts. The final product is this text, and, while we did not set out to center the publication on Hurricane Katrina, it is a topic that is relevant and ever-present in our daily lives in St. Bernard.*

*The student authors represent the young people throughout St. Bernard who have helped to bring life back to the community. In our collection, one can get a glimpse of the area through their eyes.*

Christine Karn  
Basic Composition Instructor, Chalmette High School



# *~Symbols of St. Bernard Parish~*

## ***Gumbo***

***In my opinion***, gumbo is a powerful symbol for St. Bernard Parish. Like gumbo, St. Bernard is made up of many ingredients. In gumbo, there are okra, shrimp, and crabs; in our parish, there are Spanish, French, and Native Americans. St. Bernard is a great big melting pot, and so is gumbo. All kinds of influences combine to make both our beloved dish and our beloved parish.

*- Sarah Cook*

***Gumbo represents*** St. Bernard Parish. All of the ingredients are different, like the people of our community. When we all come together, we make up one great masterpiece. We, like gumbo, may require time and effort to ensure all of our needs are met, but, when we are finished, we are very heartwarming and people cannot get enough. We are rich in success, like gumbo is rich in flavor. Finally, gumbo is a dish that will make everyone feel satisfied. Similarly, we are determined to make everyone satisfied and feel at home.

*- LaOshia Woodberry*

## ***Crawfish***

***Crawfish represents*** St. Bernard Parish in many ways. Crawfish represents the income that people bring in throughout the year by catching and selling crawfish. It also represents the traditions that we celebrate; we enjoy crawfish on birthdays, and we also celebrate Mardi Gras with crawfish. Even on a normal day, crawfish makes a great meal.

*- Seth Pascual*

## ***Mardi Gras***

***Mardi Gras*** is a huge symbol of New Orleans, as well as St. Bernard Parish. It represents how special our area is and shows the world how special we are as people. Mardi Gras shows that we are “party people” and people who enjoy having fun.

- *Willie Washington*

## ***The Saints***

***One symbol*** that represents where we live is the Saints football team. I feel the Saints represent us well because of the determination of the team. The determination reminds me of the determination of this area after Hurricane Katrina. The determination for the area to get “back on its feet” is like the determination of the Saints to have a winning season. After the destruction of the city, no one expected the city to recover. Similarly, people question the Saints’ ability to win after a number of losses. However, even though people think we will not prevail, our city and our Saints will always find a way to win.

- *Kayla Blanchard*

## ***White Shrimp Boots***

***Whenever I see*** a pair of white shrimp boots, it makes me think of St. Bernard Parish. Because the seafood industry is very important to our area, it seems like everyone down here wears or owns a pair of them. My family owns a seafood business and wears them while they work. They have become a part of their uniform due to how often they wear them! I had a pair when I was young, and this is truly a symbol that will stay with me forever.

- *Amber Manino*



*~Poetry~*  
*“St. Bernard” Acrostics*

*S*tayed strong during Katrina  
*T*rying to get back to the way it was

*B*ecoming a better place to live  
*E*nthusiastic to be home  
*R*emodeling for the new era  
*N*ever going to fail  
*A*lways will be my home  
*R*emembering Katrina every day  
*D*etermined to return to normal

*- Desmond Ceaser*

*S*alt water  
*T*rust in everything and everyone around us

*B*ringing back all of the population  
*E*ating seafood at boils  
*R*especting everyone equally  
*N*ever backing down  
*A*ll helping to improve the community  
*R*econstructing buildings and homes  
*D*iverse in culture and race

*- Katelin Gadel*

**S**pecial to me in every way  
**T**alent all around us

**B**eautiful in its own unique way  
**E**xcellent place to live  
**R**ebuilding from Katrina  
**N**ew and better things to come  
**A**mazing people reside here  
**R**are to find another place like this  
**D**a parish is where I live

*- Jennifer Martin*

**S**t. Bernard is the home of many safe communities  
**T**rusting environments

**B**usy streets  
**E**verything is back  
**R**eally nice houses and buildings  
**N**oisy streets like Judge Perez  
**A**ctive people helping others  
**R**ejuvenating “The Parish”  
**D**oesn’t give up

*- Brianne McGill*

~~Poetry~~

**S**tarting  
**T**o come

**B**ack to  
**E**njoy the city we  
**R**an from and wish to  
**N**ever leave  
**A**gain, and we will  
**R**ebuild our  
**D**estroyed but proud parish.

- *Tyrell Sinegal*

**S**eafood industry  
**T**he best place to live

**B**iggest swamps  
**E**veryone is helpful  
**R**ebuilding from Katrina  
**N**ever a lazy day  
**A**n awesome place to be  
**R**ebuilding from Gustav  
**D**eep South

- *Tyler Teal*



~~Poetry~~

## *“I’m from . . .”*

*I’m from* “down da road” and I wanna stay.  
I’m from shrimp boots and seafood gumbo.  
I’m from Mardi Gras and “Throw me something, Mister!”  
My surroundings have always been fishy tackle  
and red dirt roads,  
Bayous, and levees.

I like comfort food; that’s where I’m from.  
Pralines and pecan pie,  
Chicken ‘n’ dumplings,  
And homemade egg rolls.  
I’m from watching Daddy cut the grass in the sun  
To watching Momma cook dinner in the steam-filled kitchen.

I’m from Lena Ruth and Boogie.  
I’m from the backwoods and Delacroix Island.  
I’m from the rock hole at the creek  
To the end of the world.

- Sarah Cook

***I'm from*** Lake Bourne and the mighty Mississippi, as well.  
From the alligators and raccoons,  
Seafood and Cajun meals,  
From four-wheelers and fishing,  
From City Park and Roman candy.

From the plantations that were here before me,  
The Skate World and parks I played in,  
The monument on Bayou Road.  
From the parades and Mardi Gras beads.  
From the chicken and snowballs I eat during the summer.  
From the dance studios which I visit often.  
The iPods I listen to.  
The malls I shop in and the shoes I buy.  
The French Quarter and the parties that are thrown there.  
My home. My life.  
My everything is here.

*- Robyn Duchmann*

***I'm from*** Farmsite Road, Green Street, and South Lake.

From long days spent swimming,

And riding four-wheelers.

I am from making good grades and going to school at Lynn Oaks

And Chalmette High School.

I am from cheering and dancing,

From frequenting football and

Basketball games.

I am from seafood, boats, and water,

And long days spent on the lake.

I am from Mutt's, Nicosia's, and Pudgy's.

I am from my grandparents' summer house

And from all of the animals around me.

I am from Brandie and Peter.

- *Katelin Gadel*

*I was from* a place that was noisy.  
Cars honking, people shouting, loud music blaring  
Jazz, Blues, and Hip-Hop.  
I'm from a place where people could walk around  
Smelling the air.  
A sweet smell of beignets and coffee.  
There I was from a city of culture.  
Seeing beads on the streets.  
All of the tasty seafood I could eat,  
From jambalaya, gumbo, crawfish,  
And red beans and rice with a kick of Tabasco sauce.  
Once upon a time, I was from a city called New Orleans.

I'm from the parishes and not the counties.  
From hanging out with friends,  
To going to school.  
SBUS to Chalmette High School.  
Here I am from Chalmette.

Moving on, I'm from the levees.  
From hurricanes and evacuations.  
I'm from the wetlands, swamps, and bayous.  
I'm from Louisiana.

- *Aljohn Galino*



*I'm from* crawfishing and shrimping.  
From watching the Saints on TV,  
From snowballs and bike riding.  
I'm from the little monument that stands tall.  
The little neighborhoods  
In which I spent time with friends  
And family.

I'm from crabs  
And any seafood you can think of.  
From dogs and cats that run the streets.  
I'm from Mardi Gras and king cake.  
The movies and Skate World  
Where I grew up.

I'm from red beans and rice.  
From Lacoste Elementary  
And Chalmette High.  
I'm from Chalmette, Louisiana.  
Always have been,  
Always will be.  
This is my home,  
A part of me.

- *Amanda Retif*

***I'm from*** baseball and soccer.  
From family Christmas parties  
And Disney World.  
I am from Campagna Drive,  
LSU football games,  
And classic Disney movies.

I am from crawfish boils,  
Family Thanksgiving dinners,  
And coffee.  
I am from fishing, skiing, and riding bikes.  
From friends who care,  
And a family who is loving.

I am from my grandparents  
And French Market doughnuts.  
I am from Mardi Gras  
And Port of Call.  
I am from the best place in the world,  
St. Bernard.

- *Chanse Riess*

*I'm from* the city by the river,  
The end of the line.  
I am from the Big Easy,  
Bourbon Street,  
And the French Quarter.  
Beignets.  
I am from Hurricane Katrina  
And flooding.

I am from a newborn city.  
The Saints and the Hornets.  
Mardi Gras  
and Jazz music.  
The city of food,  
Crawfish and gumbo.

I am from St. Bernard parish.  
Violet, Louisiana,  
Chalmette High  
And basketball  
And snowballs  
And the Crescent City.  
I am from New Orleans, Louisiana.

- *Willie Washington*



## *~Narratives~*

### *Defining St. Bernard Parish*

***St. Bernard*** is a wonderful place to call home. First, it has an abundance of tasty seafood. The food is so fresh that it is hard to stop eating it. Also, there are wonderful cultural attractions. One could visit the Chalmette Battlefield, tour the plantations, or go fishing in the lake. The most important part is that all of my family resides in St. Bernard. Everyone lives down the street from everyone else. Home will always be St. Bernard to me.

St. Bernard's fresh seafood is a gift for those who live here, as well as to tourists. The seafood tastes as if it was just pulled out of the lake. During the year, we get many visitors who are interested in seeing how we catch and boil seafood. The best part is not watching how it is done, but eating it!

Old homes, plantations, and the Chalmette Battlefield bring people to St. Bernard. People tour our area to learn about the history and culture. We are proud of our past and also like to show people how we live every day.

Finally, it is easy to see family and friends while living in St. Bernard. My family all lives nearby, and that makes it easier on me to get from place to place and see everyone. It is impossible to lose touch with anyone while living so close together.

St. Bernard will always make one feel at home. We have seafood that anyone can enjoy fresh daily. There are attractions that showcase our past and help anyone to meet new people. And, finally, there is always family close when we need them. My community is truly a great place to live.

*- Robyn Duchmann*

**St. Bernard** is home to many residents. First, many people call this area home because of the safety it offers. All humans yearn to be safe. Next, the majority of the population is friendly. Whether one is driving down the street or out walking his dog, someone will take the time to start a conversation with him. Another plus to living in St. Bernard is that everyone keeps his home looking beautiful. In the neighborhoods, the grass is neatly cut and homes are ornate around the holidays. Finally, the schools in the area are the best. Education is important to everyone here, and many students leave high school to achieve great success. Many residents feel fortunate to call this area home.

To always feel safe is a gorgeous way to live life. It is nice to be free of worries and have time to enjoy all of the positive things life has to offer. Life in St. Bernard is safe and primarily worry-free. Parents and guardians benefit from the protection a safe community offers. Children feel secure and happy, as well.

Next, the majority of people in St. Bernard are very friendly. One can take a walk through his neighborhood and stop to talk to his neighbors. All of the people in my neighborhood are very friendly; my neighbor even cuts our lawn, invites us to parties, and helps with other jobs around the house. Living in a friendly place is a great way to live.

In addition, everyone in the parish keeps a beautiful home. On Saturday mornings, one often sees people taking time out to do yard work, clean their cars, and tidy the streets. Some yards are cut so neatly and look so beautiful that one may want to stop and lie on the grass!

Finally, the schools are the best. The education is exclusive; we have students here who want to learn and are making livings for themselves. The work is manageable as long as one focuses and studies hard every day. Students achieve daily, not just in academics but also through participation in extra-curricular activities. Students improve their lives by taking part in sports and clubs.

Many people call St. Bernard home. It is a great place to call home because of its safe atmosphere, friendly people, beautiful homes, and wonderful schools. Who wouldn't want to be a resident?

- *Brianne McGill*

**St. Bernard** is a great place to live. First, there is an abundance of amazing seafood. Seafood is a large part of the parish, as it is customary to have it at events and gatherings. Next, the people make St. Bernard unique. Everyone is nice and willing to help others. Finally, St. Bernard has awesome Mardi Gras parades. Every year, the parades are an exciting way to spend time during Mardi Gras. For so many reasons, St. Bernard is a truly great place to live.

St. Bernard seafood is simply amazing. Its wonderful taste makes our parties complete. Because we have access to seafood almost all year, Louisiana should be called the seafood state! Here, in my parish, it is acknowledged that St. Bernard people love their seafood!

Like the seafood, the people in St. Bernard are really special. Everyone is eager to help when needed. Immediately following Hurricane Katrina, there were a lot of people in need and a lot of people who helped others. I believe the parish is full of people who are down to earth and friendly. St. Bernard is full of people who make truly great friends!

Finally, one has never seen a parade better than a St. Bernard parade! All year, we cannot wait until Mardi Gras so we can enjoy the Chalmette parades. Thousands of people line up in the streets to enjoy the colorful, energetic parades. It is a fun way to spend our time, and, personally, I think that St. Bernard is home to the best parades in the world!

St. Bernard is such a unique place to live. There is seafood throughout the year. The people are kind and generous. The parades provide fun opportunities to gather with others. In my eyes, St. Bernard is the best place to live in the world.

- *Amanda Retif*

**St. Bernard** is a unique place. First, we were hit by a terrible hurricane. Hurricane Katrina completely destroyed St. Bernard Parish. We had flood waters up to twenty-five feet. Now, three years later, we are back and running. Next, we have some of the best fishing sites in Louisiana. There are too many to name! Every time someone goes fishing, he is guaranteed to catch some type of fish. The fish are very big and mighty tasty. Finally, we have the Chalmette Battlefield where the Battle of New Orleans took place. This historic site is where New Orleans gained its independence, I believe. Without this place, I and others probably wouldn't be here. In my opinion, New Orleans might still be a French or Spanish-speaking city. These are some of the things that make St. Bernard a special place.

Hurricane Katrina was the worst disaster in the history of Louisiana. It destroyed the state's biggest city, including New Orleans, my hometown. Almost the whole city and the surrounding areas were flooded by high waters. This is where I lived and where most of my life was spent. Even though this has happened to us, we are back and running.

St. Bernard has some of the best fishing sites in South Louisiana. If one goes down to Verret, there are a lot of places to bait a hook. Past Verret is Delacroix, and there are approximately 50 different fishing camps to choose from. My friend's grandpa owns the one that gets all of the customers, and it is called the "End of the World." When one comes to St. Bernard, he is guaranteed to catch some type of fish.

Chalmette Battlefield "made" New Orleans. This site was where the Battle of New Orleans was won. Without this site, the history of New Orleans probably wouldn't be the same. I believe New Orleans might still be under British, French, or Spanish control. It is my understanding that this historical site makes St. Bernard credible for saving New Orleans from British control.

Some of these things make St. Bernard a special and unique place. We will never be forgotten due to Hurricane Katrina. The fishing sites bring in money for us and are really some of the best. Finally, the battlefield made New Orleans, and the battle made us a historical place. All of these combine to make St. Bernard Parish a special and unique place.

- Willie Washington



## *Hurricane Memoirs*

***When I heard*** that Hurricane Katrina would be a direct hit, it was 3:30 a.m. My dad woke my brother and me to tell us that we would be evacuating. I had just recently turned eleven years old on the sixteenth of August and felt too young to understand what was happening. I simply said, “Okay,” and packed. I remember packing souvenirs and things like autographed footballs, hats, cleats, helmets, and other football memorabilia—no clothes. My mom walked in and said, “Stop packing memorabilia and start packing clothes.”

All I could say was, “Okay,” and I did as she said. When everything was packed, we took off in both of our family vehicles—my dad’s new Jeep and my mom’s old Camry. We drove to downtown New Orleans and left my mom’s car in the parking lot of her workplace with a full tank of gas. I rode downtown with my mom, then we joined my brother Brandon and my dad on the side of the Pan American building. It was time to hit the horrendous interstate.

We entered the interstate at four in the morning, and it was packed. I remember one specific moment on the highway: it was almost sunrise and we were near an electrical information board. It was to my left and not working, but I stared at it. Then I looked about one thousand feet down and noticed Xavier Prep School, and I told my mom, “I wonder how long it will take for us to get there (Xavier).” It took twenty minutes; the traffic was what we have now come to call “Katrina Traffic.” I quickly became irritated with the traffic and got out of the car. My brother Brandon tagged along, and we walked down the stretch of interstate that had become one long parking lot. Brandon and I walked from Xavier to the top of the high rise near Jesuit High School.

It turned out to be a very long journey from St. Bernard to St. Francisville, but contraflow helped. We arrived around six or seven in the evening.

- *Ryan Abadie*

***I had just started*** middle school. I enjoyed my classes, and it was my first time attending seven periods a day. I found out about Hurricane Katrina over the weekend, and, at first, all I could think was that it was no big deal. Even though I did not think it was cause for concern, I remember a panicked phone call from my nanny; she was in Florida at a concert and called to say, “You need to get out!”

That night, I stayed up with my mom to make phone calls to family and reservations. After much preparation on Saturday, we left. The traffic was unbelievably thick and aggravated me. The group of cars our family drove struggled to stay together, and it took all day just to drive from St. Bernard Parish to Houston, Texas. Once there, we circled the area around the hotel five times in an attempt to find it. We finally found our hotel, and I got out of the car to stretch while my parents went to check in. They learned that the hotel had given our room away to someone else. Luckily, a man offered to give up his room for us when he learned we were from Louisiana.

Monday rolled around, and my family and I stayed in front of the TV all day watching the news. When I learned that the parish had flooded and my house was underwater, I cried. Who didn’t? On Wednesday, my parents announced that it was time for us to have a fun day, and we went out to a local amusement park. I had fun that day, but, afterwards, it was back to the sad stories shown on TV.

Upon leaving Texas, we went to Amite, Louisiana. I disliked the small town, but felt comforted by the fact that I was in my home state. My mother, father, sister, brother, grandparents, aunts, cousins, and I lived together in an old green house that had bullet holes in the wall. In the house, we had both good times and bad, but one moment sticks out in my memory.

Near the end of December, my grandfather got sick. Shortly before New Year’s Eve, he told us, “I’m feeling better. I might be outside popping fireworks with y’all.” Then, when New Year’s Eve came, he got worse and was taken away in an ambulance. On the second of January, we got a phone call. My nanny was crying and said, “Go get your mother.” I questioned her, but she just told me to go. I did as she said, and, when my mother came downstairs, my nanny told her my grandfather had passed away. This was one situation that made me glad that Katrina happened. My grandfather got to spend time with his family, and we got to spend time with him before he passed away.

After that, it was time to prepare myself to go back to the parish for the first time. Before I went, I was able to watch a video of my parents entering the parish for their first time. On the video, my mom peeked through the window and started to cry. When my nanny asked what was wrong, my grandmother replied that her china cabinet had not been damaged.

On my own trip into the parish, I began to think about all of the old times with my friends. I started to cry. When my mother and nanny asked if I would like to turn around,

I said, "No." I needed to see my home. When we got to my street, we had to park a block away because of a house that had planted itself in the middle of the road.

When we finally went into my house, my mother said, "I feel like I'm breaking in." The adults made a path through the house, and the first thing I saw was a cross we had hung on the wall. I thought it was weird but amazing that a house can get shaken up but the cross remained straight and upright.

Overall, it was a hard time for everyone. Nothing felt the same until I came home. It was definitely a hard experience that I hope to never deal with again.

- Rene Billiot

***It all took place*** on Monday, August 29, 2005. I was eleven years old. A hurricane was heading our way; it was supposed to be a Category Five storm with winds over 150 mph. Everyone was advised to evacuate; many did, but many didn't. Some of the few who did not evacuate included me and my family.

On August 28, 2005, my mom, dad, stepdad, stepmom, and I went to my cousin's one-story home on Meraux Lane in Violet for the hurricane. We brought all of our animals, which included three dogs, three cats, one bird, chickens, ducks, two rabbits, and a goose. All of the animals were in cages, and the two dogs were in pens, but one was on a chain in the pen. The third dog was in the house. As night fell, the thunder roared, while the rain poured. The next morning, some of us woke up and ate breakfast. We thought that the hurricane was over; but, to our surprise, it wasn't.

My daddy was standing in the doorway watching the rain. Mom was sitting on the sofa watching the news, and everyone else was sitting at the table eating breakfast, except for my stepdad who was still asleep in bed. As my dad was watching the rain, he noticed that the water from the rain was creeping up to the front door. We started to lay towels on the floor in case water came inside.

All of a sudden, water came rushing into the house, and we all panicked with fear. My mom had to hurry and put garbage bags on her feet so they didn't get wet. The reason for this is because my mom has bad ankles, and, if they get wet, they will get badly infected. I hurried to awaken my stepdad. While we were doing this, my dad swam next door to break into the two-story house so that we could go there.

Finally, we all swam to the two-story house next door. I had two small dogs in my arms. As we were swimming, the wind and the water currents kept pulling me backwards and bringing me under the water. I had to hold on to a fence to keep myself up.

Terrified, I managed to make it to the house. I had to climb through the window my dad had busted and up the stairs. Once I made it upstairs, I panicked as I cried my eyes out. The water kept rising higher by the second. All I kept thinking was, "This is it. My life has come to an end, and I am going to die." Everyone was scared for his life. The next thing I knew, three more people swam to the house from a one-story house across the street. They were a young couple and their cousin. Their names were Jeff, Christy, and Lee. All of a sudden, I saw my dad jump off of the back porch into the water. It turns out that he went to rescue an elderly man and his middle-aged son who were stuck on a fence behind the house. Their names were Mr. Claude and Mr. Steven. Mr. Claude was the owner of Bradley's Pharmacy in Violet.

Suddenly, the water stopped rising at the very top stair of the two-story house. Relieved, we all sat down and got settled. I immediately searched for some clothes to change into because mine and everyone else's were soaked with smelly water. I then sat in the window and looked out at the water up to the rooftops of houses. The next thing I knew, my dog was swimming to me from the rooftop across the street. This cheered me up a lot. My goose also swam to me from next door. Somehow, it managed to escape from its cage. But, the rest of my animals were dead. They drowned in their cages when the water rose, and my dog that was chained up in the pen drowned, too. I did not have enough time to set all of the animals free before the water rose.

Sitting in the window, I squeezed my dog tightly with joy. I was so happy she was alive. I was stuck in the house from about 10:15 a.m. until about 5:00 p.m. with no food or drink. Finally, a rescue boat came along, but only six people could get in the boat. So, Mr. Claude, Mr. Steven, Jeff, Christy, my mom, and I got in the boat. We left my dad, stepmom, stepdad, cousin, and Lee stranded at the house with the three dogs and goose. The boat drove us around for about ten minutes looking for somewhere to bring us. Then, we switched boats. We drove around for another fifteen minutes looking for somewhere to go. Finally, we ended up at the St. Bernard Parish Prison. That's where all of us spent the night. We each got our own cells. The prison was packed. More and more people were being brought in. Many were injured badly when they arrived. Some even arrived dead. It was devastating. The next morning, a few of us broke into Meraux's Food Store for food. But, the cops confiscated my food from us since we had broken in. This angered me greatly since I was starving, thirsty, and sick.

Later that day, a lot of people, including me and my family, got on a ferry to Algiers. We thought that we were going to a place in Algiers that would have electricity and water. However, when we arrived, there was no one there and no one had been notified that we were coming. We waited furiously on the levee in hopes that we could get in touch with family or friends to come and get us. While we waited, a woman near us passed out. It was very scary. Soon, the police arrived and notified shelters in Baton

Rouge that we were in need of help. The shelters said that they would send buses to pick up and transport us. Time passed, and it grew later. Finally, around four p.m., the buses arrived. We endured a two-hour bus ride to Baton Rouge. My group wanted to stick together, so Jeff and Christy called family in Brookhaven, Mississippi, to come and get us.

At seven a.m., two cars arrived for us. It took us until 9:30 a.m. to get to our destination: Brookhaven. Jeff's family decided to take us in, and I found them to be very nice and generous. Because of the hurricane, however, we were left without power. My mother and I stayed with them for one week and then decided to leave due to the fear that her infection could spread to harm others. We moved on to stay with one of the family's good friends named Miss Renee. She was a very ill woman and understood my mom's condition. She, too, was very generous and nice. She provided us with everything we could think of, like clothing and personal care products; she even bought all of my favorite foods! I hope Miss Renee knows how much we appreciated her help in our time of need!

After one week with Miss Renee, my mom contacted my paw paw and asked to borrow some money. He said that he would mail her three hundred dollars to help us out. We soon discovered that my dad was in Lumberton, Mississippi, where he was staying with my aunt and her family. When we were finally able to talk to him, he said that he would be leaving in a day to go to St. Gabriel, Louisiana, and he wanted us to join him. My mom was in a bind because she needed to wait to pick up the money from my paw paw. Still, my dad came to get me. I cried and hugged my mom goodbye before leaving. There was no telling when I would see her again. When I arrived in St. Gabriel, my mom called to inform me that my stepdad was in Texas, and that is where we were headed.

I felt upset because I did not want to move away from my dad; but, I decided to make my last week with him worth it. I spent every moment with my father and other family. After one week, my mom, stepdad, stepsister, and stepbrother arrived to pick me up and take me once again to a new home. I clung to my dad and told him I loved him. Sobbing, I hugged everyone else. Then I was on the road to Pasadena, Texas. We lived there with my aunt for three weeks until we got our own house and back on our feet.

This was, by far, the most terrifying thing that I have ever experienced. I never want to relive it, and I pray for anyone who has or will experience it.

- *Christian Calandra*

***Katrina*** was a very horrific event. My family and I were asleep, and I had gotten up to use the restroom. I looked out of the window, and I saw the water rising. I ran through the house waking everyone up. By the time everyone in the house was awake, the water was up to my knees. My uncle quickly told everyone to relocate to the attic. Everyone was tense. In the attic, I warned everyone to avoid walking on the sheetrock; my younger cousin Dion almost fell through the sheetrock, but my grandmother caught him before he fell through. In the confusion, my uncle left his crowbar on the counter in the kitchen, so he had to kick a hole in the roof. When we got everyone up onto the roof, there were nine of us: me; my mom; my cousins Matt, Mason, and Mikayla (who was only five months old at the time); my cousin's stepmother Shantell; Dion, Jr.; his grandmother; and her son Dion, Sr.

We were on the roof for about four days. On the third night, we saw a boat passing and started to yell. I knew it heard us, but the boat turned out its lights and engine and cruised past us.

When we finally got off of the roof, we were moved to the Civic Center. Dead bodies were everywhere. I had to hold myself back from crying. I hated to be around all of the dead people, and people continued to pass away around us.

After the Civic Center, we moved to Keller, Texas, for one week; then, after Keller, we headed to Fort Worth, Texas. I attended a school in Fort Worth called Meadowbrook Middle School. Although I did not like my new school, I had to live with it. I was stuck in Texas. After a while, I made a few friends and joined the basketball team. Even after life improved, it was boring in Texas, and I wanted to go home.

When we finally moved back to Louisiana, we settled in East Baton Rouge. I attended school in Baton Rouge for my sixth and seventh grade years; then, as an eighth grader, I finally came home to attend Chalmette High School.

- *Desmond Ceaser*

***On the night of*** August 27, 2005, my mom came home from work right after my dad had finished boarding up the windows. She seemed worried about Hurricane Katrina. I was fourteen years old at the time, and the news of the hurricane didn't bother me much. It just seemed like another hurricane. When she arrived at home, my mom told me to pack anything I would absolutely need or want. So I packed my video games, toys, and some clothing into a large, red plastic bin. Then, the next morning, we gathered our two cats, dog, and parrot, ate breakfast, and left the house.

My parents informed me that we were going to stay with my Uncle John. I was excited because he is my favorite uncle. My excitement did not last long because the trip took forever. We could not keep the air conditioner on because the truck might overheat. The cats were as miserable as I was. They kept meowing for my mom and tried to escape the truck. Finally, we arrived at my uncle's house. My dad made me take all of our things out of the truck and into the house. I slowly began unloading pets and large bags of clothes. As I worked hard at unpacking, I heard my mom fuss at my dad for making me do the job alone; thankfully, she came to help me because some of the bags were pretty heavy. After unpacking, we ate some dinner and watched the news on TV. Shortly after that, we went to bed; thankfully, my uncle was able to provide an air mattress for me to sleep on.

Three days later, I started my first day at a new school. I attended the Magnet Academy for the Cultural Arts; from what I understood, this was a school for intelligent children who did well in band and other activities. To get into the academy, I had to play two songs on my trumpet, and I felt as though I was being interviewed for a job. I felt fortunate when I gained acceptance into the school. On my first day, I learned in band that they had a system for ranking brass players. I had to leave the school after only six months, but, the day before I left, I aced a test in band with a score of one-hundred! I obtained first chair in brass instruments. This was an honor I felt so happy about.

After school that day, I returned to my uncle's house to pack my belongings again. My parents received a trailer from FEMA in a small town called Pierre Part. I attended Pierre Part Elementary. Over Christmas break, my brother, sister-in-law, and her younger brother and sister came from Texas to visit us. I was so happy to see that my brother was okay. Before then, I had seen him only once since the storm. While they were visiting, we had a lot of good times. We played with a huge remote-controlled helicopter and many video games. During their stay, my brother and sister-in-law slept in my room. After they left, I realized that my already junky FEMA bed was broken. For the remainder of my stay in Pierre Part, I had to sleep on a broken bed.

At the end of my seventh grade year, we moved into an incredibly small FEMA camper. I began attending Our Lady of Prompt Succor, a private Catholic school. After

that, I moved on to Chalmette High School. My family moved into an apartment and finally had plenty of room to move around. My sleeping arrangements barely improved, though, and I had to sleep on an uncomfortable futon. It had metal bars that dug into my back while I slept. Eventually, my parents bought me an air mattress. That was comfortable for a while, but then it began to deflate while I was sleeping.

My parents and I began to rebuild our house after my eighth grade year. Our contractors did most of the work, but I helped with a lot of the work, as well. My parents could not handle the heavy lifting that was required. I used a device, similar to a jackhammer to scrape tiles off of the floor and an actual jackhammer to drill into the floor. This was quite difficult to accomplish.

Now, three years after the hurricane, I am living in my house. We have running water, but the bathroom is not complete; we have no doors, no trim, and no grass. We substituted the kitchen counters with pieces of wood, and there is a curtain over the bathroom door. Even with the lack of privacy, damaged yards, and lack of neighbors, I would not want to live anywhere else.

- Josh Cody

***The only real memorable event*** in my life was Hurricane Katrina. She changed my life in many ways. Some were good, while others were bad. I remember my mother saying, "I don't think that things will be the same anymore." She was right more than anyone would have liked to believe.

When we heard about the storm called Katrina in the Gulf of Mexico, my family was at my uncle's house planning a trip to Disney World, booking a hotel, and watching television. We passed a channel that featured the President speaking. Mr. Don, my cousin's grandfather, said, "That was the President! Go back!" We listened to the leader tell us about a dangerous storm headed our way. "We have to evacuate!" my mother exclaimed.

That year, we never made it to Disney World. The next day, we packed up and left around three in the afternoon. My entire extended family made up a slow-moving caravan. We arrived in Rayville, Louisiana, after midnight. My paw paw's friend had arranged for us to stay at his church. No one at the church complained once. "We're just happy to have ya'll!" the preacher told us.

The family stayed in Rayville for one week. We piled into a Sunday school classroom and slept on air mattresses. After staying at the church, we drove to Holt, Florida, to be near our cousins. My parents enrolled my brothers and me in school with our



cousins, and we remained there for a year. We lived with them until school let out for the summer. As soon as we were able to do so, we returned to St. Bernard to salvage what was left of our possessions.

The first time we went back to St. Bernard was with my aunt and uncle in their truck. I played with my baby cousin who was sitting in his car seat next to me for the entire ride. When we got off of the bridge, known as the Green Bridge to locals, there were Army men waiting with a barricade. They took the adults' identification to make sure all were residents. The first sight my eyes took in were the mountainous piles of debris along the expansive stretch of the I-10 highway.

- Sarah Cook

**The day was** August 29, 2005. The day was one of confusion. My family chose to evacuate to Houston, Texas. Because we heard on the news that a big and dangerous hurricane was headed our way, we decided to do the smart thing and head to safety. When we arrived in Houston, we stayed with my aunt's friend and watched the news nonstop to see what was happening in our home. We were in shock to see the levees break! St. Bernard and New Orleans flooded and houses were destroyed. We needed to move on to seek help, and my family made our way to Baton Rouge. We were lucky to find a shelter there; we stayed for about one week.

Help was everywhere. One specific person who offered help to my family was David Perez. He arranged for people to move to San Diego, California, to begin a new life. My immediate family and extended relatives requested a place on his list and boarded a plane for San Diego that same day. I was nervous because it was my first time on a plane. When we arrived, it instantly felt different from home. As we walked off of the plane, we were met by people taking pictures. I smiled when they welcomed us. It made me feel good inside to see that people understood how we felt, and the experience of receiving help from others made me forget the pain and sadness I felt.

My family split from my relatives after an argument, and we moved to Oxnard, California. We took a bus there to meet my stepfather's relatives and friends. I went to school in my new city; I felt happy, but like an outsider because I was not from there. We lived in a motel for approximately five months. Because my stepfather had a hard time finding a job, we decided to return to Louisiana. When I heard we were going back, I was both happy and sad because I knew my home would not be the same.

When we arrived in Louisiana, I felt so sad to see everything destroyed. Everything was pitch black, no lights were on, and it felt like a ghost town. As I looked at the house I was raised in, a teardrop fell from my eye. All of my memories started to

come back to me. I shook my head and told myself to be strong, but I just couldn't. I kept looking for the things that had been there, but were not there anymore. It took me a long time to accept what happened to us. We started to rebuild, little by little.

A school opened; the St. Bernard Unified School (SBUS) was the only school that opened in the parish. I attended SBUS starting in 2006 and continue to attend the school now that it has returned to its former name, Chalmette High School. When I first returned to school, it was packed; all students in the area in grades kindergarten through twelve went to the same school. It took some time, but everyone slowly began to get along.

At this point, everything is still changing. People have opened stores and moved back. I have come to realize that what happened brought us together, and everyone is united. I am different now in a good way, and everything just continues to improve. When I look at the past, it makes me think about how quickly things have changed here. Even if we fall, we should all get up and stand on our feet. We should move on to be strong.

- *Aljohn Galino*

***In my life***, I have been through many things, but the biggest was Hurricane Katrina. When I first found out it was coming, I wasn't too worried. My family and I planned to stay. We decided at the last minute it would not be such a good idea to stay because my brother was only six months old at the time. We left early Saturday morning, I believe.

We headed for Georgia and, surprisingly, got through the drive with hardly any traffic. We stayed in the small town of Crawford County with a few of my stepfather's friends. I was very grateful that they were so kind to us and took us in during our time of need. I couldn't think of a single way to thank them for what they did for our family.

Crawford County was very small. People quickly found out about my family and me being evacuees. Some days, we would leave the house to come back to anonymous gifts and donations left on our doorsteps. People put food, money, and clothing by our door. Sometimes, at the gas station, when people saw that our license plate read, "Louisiana," they insisted on paying for our gasoline. When we went out to eat, people would also hear our accents, pay for our food, and then leave before we could find out who they were. People were truly very generous to us.

When I finally enrolled in school, I was extremely nervous. As I walked in the classroom on the first day, it seemed like everyone had a million questions to ask me! My first day at school went better than I expected it to, and I began to feel like a celebrity there because, as I walked around, everyone knew me. Reporters from the newspaper came to school to photograph me with my new friends and write about how I was the only student in the town's three schools who was an evacuee. I became close with my new friends and attached to my new school.

After a few months, I became used to my new surroundings. One day after school, while I sat in my room, my mom called out to me, "Mariah, pack your things. We will be leaving tomorrow." I was shocked and furious. "Why didn't anyone tell me?" I asked myself. I felt hurt because the news came so suddenly. I did not want to leave; I had friends and everything else I could want. The next day, I walked into school looking very morose. It was hard to tell everyone who had been so nice and caring to me goodbye. At the end of that school day, I felt even more upset. When I walked out of the school, my family was waiting for me so we could leave Crawford County.

We did not go back to Louisiana to live right away. We first moved to Picayune, Mississippi. In Picayune, I lived with family and attended a school called Hancock Middle School. Each day, to attend school, my cousins and I rode a bus for two hours. After a few months passed, we moved again to a different part of Mississippi called Nicholson. I began going to Nicholson Elementary. At this point, I felt tired of making so many moves and making new friends only to move again. Nicholson was different than the other schools I had previously attended; it was small and only had about forty students in the sixth grade. My mom made the decision for me to finish out the school year there.

Now, I am living back in the place I love: St. Bernard! I have been attending Chalmette High School for three years. I enjoy the school and the people in it. If I were to move again because of a hurricane, I would be devastated. Hurricane Katrina was a depressing thing, but it brought about many exciting adventures and added wonderful memories to my life.

- *Mariah Hazelwood*

***It was the beginning*** of my new life. It was the beginning of a new life for everyone. I moved to St. Bernard Parish a month before August 29, 2005. I was thirteen years old and was just beginning to adjust to my new home. Two days before Hurricane Katrina, my mother and I returned from a shopping spree to hear the news of a threat to New Orleans and St. Bernard. The threat was a huge hurricane. The day was very cloudy and windy, and I felt emotional as my family gathered at my grandmother's house. As we all met up, we shared a feeling of confusion. The day was emotional for me. I learned that I would have to leave my grandmother, my brother, my aunt, and my cousins behind.

After the family discussion, we were off to another state. The day I left, I not only left behind the people I loved, but also the things I loved to do. We headed to Tunica, Mississippi, and I felt extremely homesick. I didn't feel normal or whole. The time felt very depressing.

Watching the news, we were devastated. We saw people dying, and the whole area looked wiped out. We questioned what had happened to our family; but, finally, we got the call that they were okay. They were transported to Houston, Texas. I was so excited to hear that we would be going to Texas and then back home that I cried. We drove for an entire day to get to Texas.

My family and I decided to live in Texas. At first, I was okay with the decision. Then, I did not like it because I didn't know anyone, and the people I encountered were not very friendly. I had to deal with it for the duration of one year; then, I finally came home to Louisiana.

My life improved, even though I had to live in a FEMA trailer. I felt happy to be in a place that I was familiar with. My mother did not have a job for a while, but we tried to maintain the lifestyle that we had before the hurricane. The school that I attended was Chalmette High School. With many students back at Chalmette High, I met two best friends.

Since the hurricane, things have begun to return to normal. It has been a process to rebuild buildings, houses, and stores. The hurricane may have destroyed our property and valuables, but it didn't destroy our hope.

- Yasmonique Hookfin

**On August 28, 2005**, at 12:00 a.m., my mother, sister, sister's children, uncles, aunts, and grandmother left for Texas due to the impending threat of Hurricane Katrina. My dad chose to stay because he had evacuated for a prior hurricane and nothing had been damaged. He assumed that nothing would happen again. On August 29, 2005, the hurricane hit. Power went down. I tried and tried to call my dad on his cell phone, but all I heard was a busy signal.

The next day, I received a text message from my dad. It read, "I am all right." We began to text back and forth, and he told me that the balcony on our home had blown off. I felt terrified because I thought my dad might not make it.

Then on September 1, 2005, my aunt from Pennsylvania called my family and said, "You guys come on up here to Pennsylvania!" My face lit up like a Christmas tree. It took my family eighteen hours to get from Texas to Pennsylvania. When we arrived, it was dawn. We pulled up to see a swimming pool in the backyard. Things seemed to be looking up despite the fact that there were twenty people living in the house.

A few days later, we were featured on the *Today* show in New York City. Our story was on almost every news station in Pennsylvania. Every day, people brought us food. We lived there for almost an entire year until my grandmother died.

After leaving Pennsylvania, I moved to Hammond, Louisiana. I enjoyed life in Hammond, but it was not better than Pennsylvania. I lived in Hammond for two years. Then, it was time to move back to St. Bernard Parish. I could not wait to move back to Violet, Louisiana. I wanted to begin my freshman year at Chalmette High School.

- *Kenneth Lawrence*

**In sixth grade**, I thought my life was perfect. I had a lot of friends, and I had accomplished my biggest goal at the time, which was making the Bidy Belles dance team. All of that did not last long at all. August 29, 2005, changed my life forever. When I found out that we were going to flood, I was so upset. I thought—well, knew—that St. Bernard was done for.

I had to evacuate to Mississippi. I only packed clothes for three days because that's how long we figured we would be gone. Three days turned into six long, heart-aching months. I had to start a new school, which was very hard for me. I cried every single day. My mom would often try to comfort me and tell me things would be okay. She said things would get better soon, but it was hard to believe at the time.

Starting school at West Jones was difficult, to say the least. I had zero friends. I had to start all over and attempt to make new ones. This wasn't too hard for me because I make friends very easily. So, as I started to make friends in Laurel, Mississippi, life wasn't as hard. Of course, this still wasn't home, and that was all that I wanted. After living in Laurel for two months, it began to hit me how much I missed home! I started to realize that my current home would never be "home." I wasn't used to the dry, crisp, cold Mississippi air. I actually missed the hot, sticky, humid air in Louisiana.

Finally, after six months of waiting and wondering when we would ever return to the only place we love, we got to go home. I was the happiest I had been in a long time. I started school at the St. Bernard Unified School (SBUS). At SBUS, I saw all of my old friends and made new ones. I was finally home, but seeing my home and my things scattered everywhere brought tears to my eyes. Debris covered my house. My refrigerator, which belonged in a kitchen, was turned upside down in my living room. There was black mold covering the walls and ceilings. The worst part was that my family members were put out of their jobs.

Life finally started to return to normal after three years of hard work. SBUS turned into Chalmette High, which I now attend. I am on the Charmers dance team, and that is something that I always wanted to do. But, of course, something had to ruin this, too. Another hurricane hit close to us, Hurricane Gustav, and we were forced to evacuate again. We returned to the same ol' place—Laurel, Mississippi.

On the way there, we were stuck in traffic for what felt like an eternity, and we were listening to a song that said, "The last three years were just a lie." That scared us. The drive that usually took two hours took twelve. This time, however, we were only there for four days, which was great. When we came home, the most damage we had were a downed tree in our driveway and no electricity. It was so hot, and, once again, my family was put out of work for a long time.

Of course, this is life, and no one said it was going to be easy. It is filled with highs and lows, good and bad. Sometimes, life can be very scary. Now, everything is slowly getting back to normal. And I wouldn't change a thing.

*- Amber Manino*

***It was five in the morning.*** I was very tired as I stretched and walked into the bathroom to brush my teeth. This was a part of my everyday routine. Unfortunately, this would be the last time I would do this in my small, perfect little house in Arabi, Louisiana. I was young then, but old enough to understand that my life might never be the same again. My mother and sister would soon leave the house in one car, and my father and I in another. As my father turned his engine on, we took one last glance at our house and said our goodbyes. We were then off to Beaumont, Texas, to stay with relatives.

Going to Texas was very exciting for me because I am a huge Dallas Cowboys fan. Even though they were in the off-season, I still wanted to visit their training camp. Sadly, that opportunity would never come as a horrific body of water crashed into my city and completely devastated our homes and lives. When I heard, my stomach felt ill as if I were nauseated. Knowing that everything I left at home was gone was awful, but I didn't cry like everyone else. I knew that there was virtually nothing I could do about it.

After hearing the bad news, we finally arrived at our relative's house. I met relatives I never even knew existed. I was excited to meet one cousin in particular because he was the same age as me, and I knew we would get along. There were also a lot of kids in the surrounding neighborhood who I could hang out with. Looking back, I had a lot of people who were looking out for me and cared about my feelings.

After the city was cleared for return, we went back to wonderful Metairie. Only, it wasn't so wonderful. It was very boring. Don't get me wrong—I was grateful to live there, but it just wasn't home. In Metairie, I felt an emptiness in my heart. After living there for three years, my family moved back to St. Bernard.

Going to Chalmette High made my life a lot better because I just love the people there. It felt good to be around people who had been through the same things I had been through because they understood my struggle. Everything started to come together during my eighth grade year. I made a lot of friends, and my life was finally perfect. Later that year, however, my father moved out, and again I was in an unhappy state. Shortly after that, my grandmother passed away. I thought to myself, "God never gives anyone more than he can handle." Thankfully, I had my next-door neighbor and best friend Dylan, who always cheers me up when I am down. I believe that he was a Godsend during my hard times after the storm. He would always come over, and we would work out and play basketball together.

I believe the death of my grandmother drew everyone in my family tremendously closer together than we had ever been before. This upcoming Christmas holiday, my

whole family is going on a ski trip! I cannot imagine everyone in the family going on a trip like that before the storm or the other tragedies we have faced.

Also, I am now practicing with the varsity basketball team as a freshman, which makes me feel good about myself. My mom and dad are proud of me, and I know my grandmother would be, too. Because they always say the best stories end with a quote, let me share something that my great grandmother always tells me: "Life is long, do not rush yourself. Time will heal and time is forever. There is always somebody who has it worse than you. Count your blessings and see the glass as half full."

- Leo Murphy

***Sunday was a dark day*** that August. Clouds were everywhere. I heard yelling and things banging together from people around me packing in a rush. Our camper was packed with all of our things. My stepfather was driving his truck, my mother was driving her van, and my grandma was taking her SUV. Our pack of three was headed to Tennessee to evacuate for the storm that was headed to Louisiana. It was said that the storm on its way would become a huge hurricane. I told my mom that the wind was picking up, and she replied, "I know. We need to get out of here soon."

While crossing the Twin Span, I noticed that the lake had five-foot waves. It was dark and scary outside. It took us about three-and-a-half hours to get to Slidell. None of us wanted to be on a lengthy trip. The next thing that happened proved to be very inconvenient. My stepfather's truck that was pulling the packed camper broke down. Every other vehicle in our caravan was filled to the roof. All of my things were in the camper. This issue caused us to lose an hour, and traffic seemed to move slower and slower as we got back on our way. By the time I arrived in Tennessee, the hurricane was just hitting my house.

The following Monday morning, I was very upset. I turned on the hotel's TV as soon as I got there. It was about seven in the morning. When we heard that St. Bernard had been filled with water, tears were everywhere from disbelief. No one believed that Hurricane Katrina would bring in raging waters that surged up to fifteen feet. Everyone had been focused on the fact that the hurricane would bring damaging tornados to the area. In the end, the results of Hurricane Katrina were devastating.

After leaving Tennessee, we went to Mississippi. I did not like it there. The school was small, and I did not feel it met my academic expectations. It was a thirty-minute drive from where we were staying to a Wal-Mart or a McDonalds. It always seemed to be too quiet, and I felt like I was in the middle of nowhere. I couldn't wait to move back to Louisiana.



When we heard that we were going to get money for the damage our home sustained, we felt a little better. We did not receive help from the Road Home Program, but did receive help from FEMA and our insurance carrier. We got enough to fix up my house, and, while we had to do everything ourselves, it was worth it. While we rebuilt, I kept thinking to myself, "I am going to sleep in my room again." It took us approximately two months to collect materials and fix up my house.

Looking back, it is hard to imagine that in August of 2005, we went from packing to flooding in just twenty-four hours. Although I once worried about losing my things due to the breakdown of my stepfather's vehicle, my concern changed to simply getting back into my house. I wanted to sleep in my comfortable bed in my familiar, cold bedroom. Everyone once felt depressed about our losses, but St. Bernard has come back and rebuilt.

- Colin O'Brien

***There I was*** at my dad's hunting camp on August 29, 2005, when they said Hurricane Katrina hit land in Louisiana. I felt depressed when they showed me the pictures on the news. After the storm, my family went to my uncle's house; our group included me, my mom, dad, sister, uncle, aunt, three dogs, and a cat. When we arrived at my uncle's house, they were still without power. The week was boring and felt like forever.

From there, we went to my grandpa's house because he lived in Slidell and had power. We stayed with my grandpa for awhile, and I was able to meet up with one of my friends from my neighborhood. Then it was time to make an emotional trip.

The first time that they let us back into the parish was one of the most emotional moments in my entire life. We left Slidell around six in the morning. The traffic was awful because everyone wanted to see what was left of his home. On our way to St. Bernard Parish, we passed Six Flags, our old amusement park, and it was all messed up. Then, as we passed over the bridge into the parish, all I could see for miles was blackened mud. It covered the land like snow covers the winter ground.

Right after the bridge, there was a cross with Jesus on it that said, "Keep the spirit. We will rebuild." Down the road, police officers were checking licenses to make sure that everyone entering was a resident. Driving down Judge Perez Drive, all I could see were old businesses and stores with shattered windows, and the whole parish had a nasty stench to it. The smell was so rotten that we had to wear painter's masks.

When I finally reached my street, there was no one around. Pulling up to my house, I thought that it looked perfectly fine from the outside. We couldn't get in through the side door because there was a giant skimmer net meant for shrimping wrapped around most of the house. Finally, we were able to pop open the front door, and there were three inches of mud covering the floor of the whole house. All of the furniture was upside down and full of mold. The refrigerator and pantry stunk of rotten food. Thankfully, my room was upstairs so none of my things were damaged.

A funny moment that day was when my dad went to his room and opened one of his dresser drawers to find a six-foot python inside! He jumped back and fell onto his moldy bed. That was one of the only funny things about that day. We had to leave the parish at five in the evening because of a curfew. We left there with nothing, as our lives seemed emotionally and physically destroyed.

- Devin Peters

***It wasn't too long ago*** that Hurricane Gustav hit. We were in the beginning of the school year. At first, no one thought that it was going to be a threat. Then, the storm started to grow bigger and bigger, and people began to worry that it would be worse than Hurricane Katrina.

My dad planned on staying for the storm to watch his business. He owns an ice company. My mom didn't want to leave him, so she wanted to stay, too. I planned on staying with them. My brother Ryan did not want to leave his many animals, so he also wanted to stay. My sister and two other brothers went to my mimi's house in Mississippi. Most of our family was there. They repeatedly tried to call and text us in hopes that they could get us to leave. Finally, we decided we would.

My mom, brother, and I left the day before Gustav hit; my dad stayed. We ended up bringing most of our animals with us. Thankfully, there was little traffic as we drove to Mississippi, but we had to drive on the opposite side of the highway due to contraflow.

When we arrived in Mississippi, everyone settled upstairs. When Gustav hit, it was so windy that we lost electricity. We had no lights or air conditioning for about four days. There was nothing for us to do, and we were bored out of our minds. While we were there, we didn't exactly agree with everyone else. Because tensions were high and they did things differently than we did, we ended up getting in a lot of arguments. The next day, we packed up our things and left.

No one wanted us to leave because they did not think that we could get back into St. Bernard. We didn't care, as long as we were not in Mississippi anymore. We made only one stop at a gas station on the way home; besides that, it took us about three hours to arrive in the parish. When we got to St. Bernard, we had to show identification to prove that we lived there. There were a lot of men with guns standing around to make sure that everyone was where he was supposed to be. When we got home, we had no electricity, so we had to hook up our generator. I was so glad to be home and so glad that Hurricane Gustav was nothing like Hurricane Katrina. For Katrina, I was gone for a couple of months. For Gustav, I was only away for a couple of days. My experience with Gustav was much easier than my experience with Katrina.

- Ashley Ricouard

**The year was 2005.** I was twelve years old. The school year was just beginning, and I was excited to be a part of my school's football team. While watching the news one day, I saw a massive swirl in the Gulf passing Cuba and Jamaica. At that moment, I felt scared. That night, my parents frantically packed our things. I remember they told me, "We have to leave right now!" The weather on the news looked bad. My mother announced that we would have to leave our truck to save money; but, luckily, I was able to bring my dogs with me. We gave the dogs medicine to calm them down, and we were on the road. Just like that, we were headed to Florida.

When we got there, it was dark and cloudy. The weather was gloomy, but not a single drop of rain fell as we walked down the beach to swim in the whipping wind. We had to get out of the water because of high winds and rough water. We learned quickly that the bad weather was the result of a huge hurricane that had entered the Gulf.

We stayed in Florida until Katrina hit Louisiana, and, afterwards, we began our long journey home. The first place we stopped and stayed a while was Alabama. We lived at a hunting camp with family friends. We had a blast in Alabama; they showed us all of their hunting spots and taught us how to plot fields for deer season. Next, we drove to another hunting camp in Mississippi. This was only for one night. In the morning, we made our way back home.

When Katrina hit, I lived in Lafitte. Because Lafitte did not get hit as badly as St. Bernard, our house survived the storm. The house received some wind damage, but it wasn't much. When Rita came a week later, we had to leave again. This time, we traveled to a little city called Calhoun at the top of Mississippi. We met really friendly

people who helped us greatly. They helped us find a house; we moved in to it and ended up living there for a year. Then, at the end of my sixth grade year, we moved back to Louisiana.

The problem was we no longer had a house to come back to. Rita destroyed my family's house completely. My grandmother's house in St. Bernard Parish also was destroyed, but she gave it to us when she bought a new place to live. It has taken us a long time to rebuild it, but we did. While we waited for the new house to be completed, we lived in Lafitte with some of our relatives. When we got into our house, I said, "Finally, home sweet home."

- Tyler Teal

*Living in New Orleans* was the greatest thing on earth. I was about twelve years old when the drama began, and my life started to change. Just a few weeks before August 29, 2005, my family and I were eating our favorite foods, barbecuing for our traditional summer picnics, and just having good, old-fashioned fun. It was getting close to the beginning of my first day of middle school, and everyone debated whether or not we should get ready for the storm.

Our church's anniversary was that very Sunday, and I was barely paying attention until my pastor kept repeating the phrase, "A new beginning." That phrase really caught my attention, and I remember it to this day. My family went out and bought an array of supplies in preparation for the storm. First, I was okay with everything until I saw how many people were leaving for safety.

Our family chose to stay at home because we just didn't feel comfortable leaving. I remember the sight of our neighbors leaving with their dog and a trail of smoke slowly following their car as they rode away. That was the last we ever saw of those smiling, heart-warming faces. Everyone around us boarded his home so that water would not get in. My family did not, though, since my grandmother loves to be different. Instead of having bad feelings about the storm, she walked around the house praying that no harm or danger would come to my family. Many people laughed at her and called her crazy, but I knew she was doing exactly what she thought was right. That night, there was so much wind and water hitting the house that I could hardly sleep.

We woke up the next morning and ate breakfast. The power outage did not stop us from making a meal on our gas stove. My family personally did not know that New Orleans was flooding because we did not receive any water or damage inside of our home. I now feel glad that my grandmother prayed because, if she didn't, I think that we might have had a different fate.

Suddenly, we got a phone call from our grandfather saying that the whole city was under water, and we needed to leave quickly. We gathered up most of our belongings and left our home. On the street, we saw a lot of police cars patrolling to keep people from looting to get the things they might need. We found the Mississippi River Bridge and drove on it all the way to the end. Finally, we found a back road to shelter.

It got very hot, and my uncle's car had a flat tire. Just our luck! It was difficult to hear everyone complain about the heat and how tired and sore he or she was from riding around all day. It was a good thing my family knew how to fix the car; otherwise, we may have been out there all day. Next, we pulled into a Best Western Hotel and found there were still several rooms available. The hotel was our home for a few weeks until we found a house of our own. While living in the hotel room, we had about eight people piled up in the very small space. Even though it was crowded and hectic, we found a way to make good things come from a negative situation. I remember hearing a lot of people in the room crying and complaining about how their homes were destroyed.

While trying to find a place to live, my siblings and I attended Donaldsonville High School. They welcomed my family and me with open arms and treated us well. My grandmother later found a home in Duncanville, Texas, and I felt a little sad because I was just beginning to get used to my new school. I didn't want to leave, but we had to because there was no other place to go.

We settled in our new home in Duncanville one week later. It was much bigger than our home in New Orleans, so we immediately fell in love with it. Since I was from New Orleans, I made many friends on the spot, and it somewhat felt like home again. I attended William H. Byrd Middle School and got really involved with the school by joining the yearbook club, step team, and several other cool activities. Even though I was feeling down about the hurricane and slightly rebellious, my relationships with everyone were growing better each day.

I knew I could never forget Donaldsonville, Louisiana, or Duncanville, Texas, but, at some point, it would be time for me to go back to my real home. We moved back to New Orleans in May of 2007. I started attending Chalmette High School and made some more great friends, some of whom I call my best friends today. Even though I had my doubts about all of the changes taking place, it has been a great experience overall to travel and meet great new people. I am currently excelling in a wonderful school and feel satisfied with my life. This experience has taught me a lot of things and that change is very good for you every once in awhile.

- *LaOshia Woodberry*



~~Narratives~~  
*The Future*

***When the hurricane hit***, my thoughts were, “We are off of the map.” I thought that New Orleans and St. Bernard would not exist anymore. But, look what happened. We are back, and we are going to be better than ever. In the past, I had so many negatives in my head. I had no room for positive thoughts. But, the positives did not need to be in my head; they needed to be in the leaders’ heads, and they were. I feel so much better now that we are almost back to normal. We will definitely be much stronger in the long run.

- *Ryan Abadie*

***I feel now*** like everything will be all right. I think New Orleans and St. Bernard are going to get better as time progresses. The reason I think this is because we have a lot of hardworking people to help us. Also, New Orleans is a historical place and so is St. Bernard; if they were not rebuilt, then it would feel as though we had lost a piece of ourselves.

- *Desmond Ceaser*

***After Katrina hit***, I was absolutely sure that my city would survive. There are too many people attached to St. Bernard to let it die. St. Bernard is, as I’d put it, a proud parish. I was scared. We were all scared. Of course, we would be. But, I still feel that St. Bernard is too strong to be taken down. I do think that enduring Hurricane Katrina made us stronger. She made us see that destruction was a real possibility. That helped us to prepare for the next hurricane. I guess it’s about how you see the glass. Is it half empty or half full? Are we deteriorating or learning from our mistakes?

- *Sarah Cook*

***I feel much better now*** because my friends and most of my family are back. I know some people who have doubts about the levees and the water rising. St. Bernard will probably never be the same again.

- *Devin Cooper*

***I think*** that St. Bernard and the surrounding areas that were affected by Hurricane Katrina will be better in the long run. New people are coming every day to live and to help rebuild. At the time that Katrina hit, I felt hopeless. Now, we have schools, stores, and a community of people. When I see the people who are already back or notice people moving in, it makes me so happy to see that we are making progress. In some ways, I think it was good for Katrina to hit. In other ways, I can't stand that it happened. In the end, our city is coming back, and that's what really counts.

- *Anastasia Leonard*



*Recognizing  
the Student Writers*



*Ms. Karn's Period One  
Basic Composition Class*

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# *Ms. Karn’s Classes Take a Break from Writing . . .*



# *Autographs*



# *Rebuilding, Remembering, and Rewriting St. Bernard Parish*

*This publication is the culmination of a university-funded Center for Faculty Excellence Innovative Teaching Initiative (CITI) grant, University-Community Collaboration: Enhancing Pedagogy and Publication through Service-Learning that involves university-community collaboration between educators at Chalmette High School in St. Bernard Parish and faculty at Southeastern Louisiana University in the Department of English and the Department of Teaching and Learning.*

*Through service-learning opportunities, undergraduate teacher candidates in the Department of Teaching and Learning and graduate students in the English Department worked together to assist high school students in publishing their writing that documents everyday life and times in the St. Bernard Parish community.*

*The goals of the project are to enhance pedagogy through service-learning in undergraduate and graduate programs and to enhance university-community partnerships as well as increase the number of university courses that incorporate service-learning and civic engagement. It is our hope that this project will directly impact classroom instruction at the undergraduate and graduate levels and highlight the work of high school students interested in writing about their community.*

*Dr. Cynthia Elliott*

*Dr. Jayetta Slawson*

*Dr. Frances Wood*