

# Voices of Katrina

## HEAR VOICES!

Before you begin to worry, let me explain...

I hear the voices of victims, those in need and of mourning. But I also hear the voices of heroes, champions and victors.

They are broken voices of friends and loved ones whose lives were devastated on August 29. They are fragile voices of need from strangers who wait for help. They are unforgettable voices of care and assistance from brothers and sisters who put flesh on their faith by responding, one to another, with unbelievable acts of kindness.



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They are powerful voices of change and opportunity from slabs and piles of rubble that wait to be rebuilt and restored. They are familiar voices from those who will never forget the sound of the wind – or the silence of the next day.

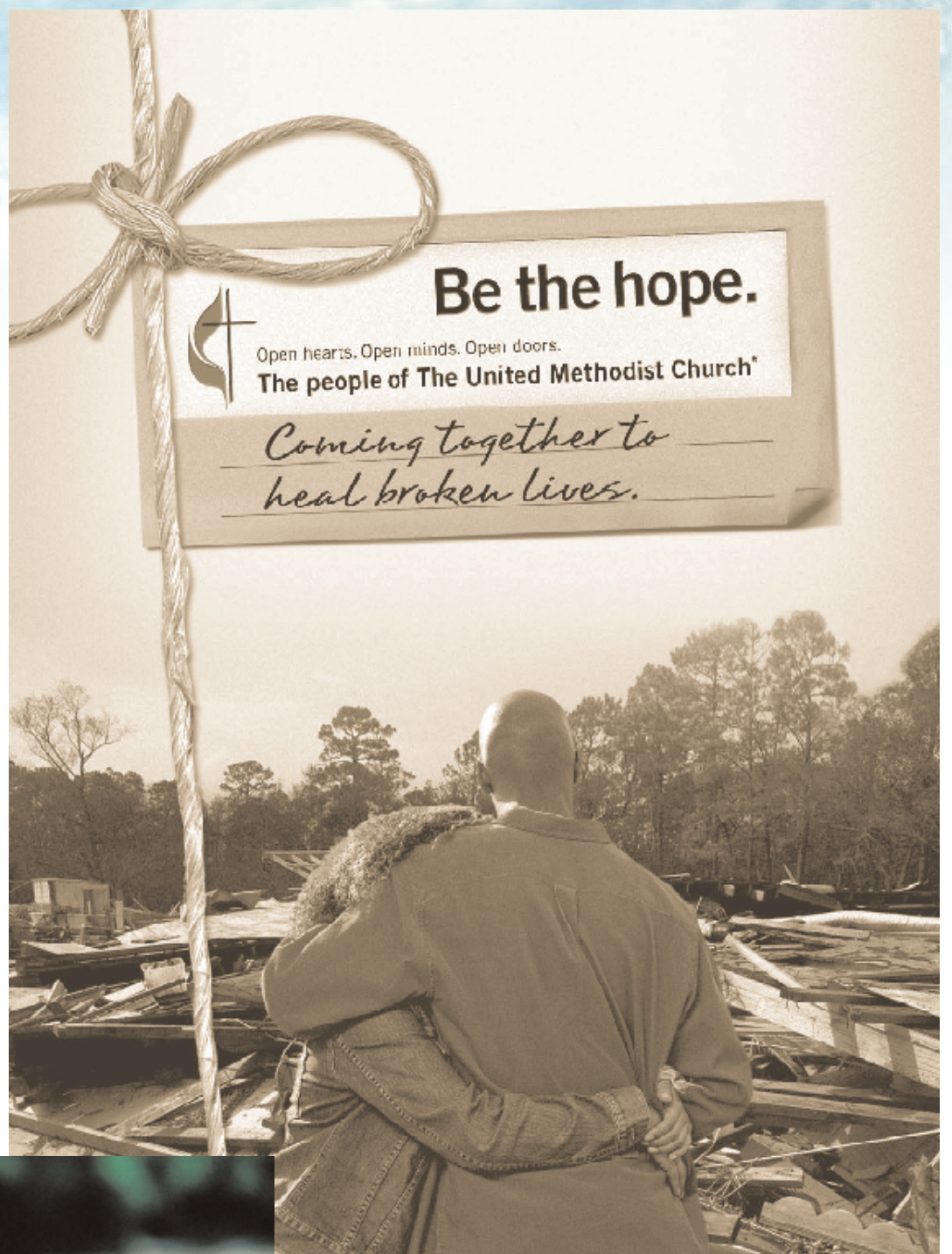
They are hopeful voices from communities committed to old things in new ways. They are melodic voices from those who continue to sing in spite of no instruments or song books. They are faithful voices from congregations continuing as “the church” despite the absence of a church building. They are young voices of children and youth who remind us all how to laugh and play among the debris. They are special voices of those still sitting by the city gates wondering if the lessons of such a tragedy will teach us how to live together.

They are personal voices... our voices... and we should all stop to listen.

**REV. SHANE STANFORD**  
*Communications Commission  
 Chairperson*



Getty Images



■ **WE NEED TO HEAR YOUR STORY.** Part of the healing process from any disaster is the sharing of stories and experiences of how this event has changed, shaped and inspired us. *Voices of Katrina* provides an outlet for those affected to help all of us see past the everyday media coverage to experience the more personal, spiritual side of this disaster. Please send stories to Stanford by e-mail at [lsstanford2003@yahoo.com](mailto:lsstanford2003@yahoo.com) or by U.S. mail to 85 Holly Trail, Petal, MS 39465. Experiences will be printed in future editions of *Voices of Katrina* on a first come, first serve basis as space allows. *Voices of Katrina* is produced by the Mississippi Conference Communications Commission.

## VOICES OF KATRINA

### The voice of... Allen McGraw

We were still several hundred miles from the coast when we began seeing the tell-tale signs of Katrina's fury, a battered sign here, a missing shingle there. With each passing mile as we approached our destination, the scene became increasingly bleak; mile after mile of endless destruction mirroring the battered souls that sought refuge from the storm.

There are moments in time when reality bursts upon you with such ferocity that you are changed forever. On Saturday, Sept. 10, I experienced such a moment when I was awakened from a dreamy sleep-like state, induced by a constant barrage of unimaginable images of destruction so widespread that my mind became numb to the never-ending sea of battered lives. Slowly at first, the images came, as we made our way from Northwest Mississippi, south to Gulfport, then west on I-10 to Waveland, crossing Highway 90 to Gladstone Street and finally to the small one-story house with the green roof, where we went about the task of collecting what remained of our loved ones' treasures.

We gathered pictures taken over several lifetimes, furniture that Grandpa made, wood carvings that spent hours being fashioned on the craftsman's table, keepsakes and mementos, things of value because of time not money spent. And when the last strap was being tightened on the trailer, I realized that the time spent with my family in this labor of love was, oh, so



Photo by Allen McGraw

much more valuable than the priceless treasures we collected. These irreplaceable reminders of life's most precious moments became for me symbols of life's

most enduring theme, love. Good enough, lesson learned, or so I thought.

*One last time before we leave, I'll survey the damage done to this small house with the green roof.* As I walk around the southern end of the house, I notice something brightly white among the gray fence slats and brown pine needles. Hurriedly now I move forward. What could this be that stands out so starkly against the brokenness?

Anguish now washes over me, as I realize that I am seeing what I hoped to never see. It is a tiny white shoe, washed undoubtedly by the churning waters and the pounding rain. A small white sneaker with a Velcro strap, small enough for maybe a four-year-old. A four-year-old... my son is four years old. My heart breaks as I wonder how many times this small white sneaker with a Velcro strap was slipped onto a little four-year-old foot. Sometimes in a hurry, "Come here and put this shoe on, we're going to be late." Or maybe playfully, "Boy, that's not a foot." How many mornings do you think were spent looking for this little white sneaker with a Velcro strap? "Here it is. I found it under the bed."

Now I've found it, and I wish I could slip it on the little foot that lost it.

— Allen McGraw, *Courtland UMC*, from his blog, *Methodist Corner*, Sept. 12, 2005

### The voice of... Rev. RoseMary Hayes Williams

On Aug. 28, 2005, our community went under mandatory evacuation because of the approach of a hurricane named Katrina. My family packed the car while I went to my usual Sunday morning worship service since the weather appeared to be no different than any other Sunday morning. Pictures and other important papers were packed along with a change of clothes for each of us, and we were off to Buckatunna to gather my mother and great aunt for a trip to Montgomery, Ala., to wait out the storm. The hotel where we stayed housed many families from the coast and American Red Cross volunteers waiting to be told to report either to Mississippi or Louisiana.

On Monday, Aug. 29, Hurricane Katrina roared ashore and pummeled the Mississippi Gulf Coast, other parts of the state, and New Orleans with untold destruction.

The Tuesday morning after the

storm, our day began with us convincing our children that it was okay to return home even though the pictures shown by the news media had us in total disbelief that such extensive devastation could be wrought by Katrina. The drive home provided lots of evidence that a storm had come through Alabama as well. As we traveled Highway 84 from Montgomery to Waynesboro, downed trees and electrical wires, bare housetops, no gasoline and much more exposed the depth and destruction of the storm.

We were not allowed to enter the coast area until Wednesday morning, Aug. 31. This was unnerving when you consider that we had stayed in line six hours in Wiggins for gasoline pumped by a generator.

As we entered the area known as the Mississippi Gulf Coast, it became obvious that the destruction of Katrina was tantamount to nothing we'd witnessed before. We found our

home partially intact – a tree in the roof and so much debris in the yard the lawn was invisible, but in full view, a beautiful red lily was in full bloom. This lily could have been a victim of Hurricane Katrina, but this beautiful red flower gave hope and continues to offer hope that a brighter day is ahead.

Hope was really needed when I made my way to Pass Christian, because in most of the homes were people familiar to me. Many were homes of the parents of children I had taught in the public schools, homes of children I had taught, and homes of members of our congregations for the past 10 years; people we have known and loved for more than 35 years.

Homes were in the streets, which made travel very difficult. School buses were in houses, and this quaint little city that I love so much was in splinters. Churches, businesses, and homes were flooded and it looked as though an angry agitator had entered the town in the early morning and stayed for weeks, wreaking havoc on the city and its people. Almost everything was out of place, but two stained-glass windows in the church that my husband pas-

tors remained with little damage and one read "Love thy neighbor as thyself." There were signs left to give us hope and to remind us not to look at the massive damage but to remember "the still small voice" that God uses to speak to us as the red lily spoke to me.

Our congregation was in the beginning stages of building a new church when Hurricane Katrina struck. Now, each time I go to monitor the progress, I find that this building has taken on new meaning for me. As progress is made, it stirs me to move ahead with a new faith and as pastor/leader I hope to encourage both my congregants and the community to do the same.

We are on a mission for God and if we let Him set our agenda, we will have boundless hope. He never promised that we would be spared suffering, devastation, or pain, but He did promise that He would see us "through" all our difficulties. Paul tells us in Romans, "Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Spirit." Our new church, though incomplete, now represents to me that our hope is secure and anchored in God, which should give us the encouragement, the assurance, and the confidence to know that this community will again be more beautiful than ever.

— Rev. RoseMary Hayes Williams, *DeLisle Mount Zion UMC*, *Pass Christian*



Construction progresses on the new home of Mount Zion United Methodist Church.

## VOICES OF KATRINA

**The people were sharing information through the streets that the church had water and other supplies for them.** — Rev. Authur Lewis Jr.



Judy McGoogan of Grace UMC in Naperville, Ill., holds Kaitlyn Pitts at Leona UMC in Vossburg during an informational meeting for New Orleans evacuees arranged by Rev. Lewis.

Photo by Dave Carlson

### The voice of... Rev. Arthur Lewis Jr.

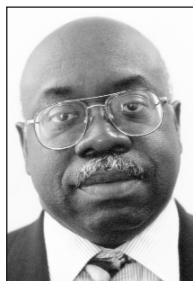
**K**atrina had come and gone, and after the guys cut down the trees in the street, my wife and I went to see our parishioners of this four-point charge that I have and her patients. We went from house to house to find out if everyone was okay. We went from church to church checking on the buildings to see what damage occurred. Driving along, we found that two of the churches had tree damage to their roofs and shingles missing. The people had been stricken. No one in this area had seen such a catastrophe like this before.

I had to go to Meridian to get a signal on my cell phone. We had enough gas to get to Meridian, and we prayed that we would be able to get more gas. We went to Wal-Mart to get some necessities. I made phone calls to UMCOR and began to make connections with superintendents and other needed contacts. We started getting food, clothing, personal items, pillows, sheets, towels, personal hygiene items and baby items; it was awesome.

Once we made that land line, UMCOR just started dispatching. Thank God for Jeff Pruett and Superintendents David Price and Andy Ray; Andy wanted me to work with him in the Rose Hill area, which is in his district, but I needed to work the Jasper County area. I ended up working his area also. I included those churches along with the other 32 churches the distribution center located at the Leona Church was helping receive food, clothing, baby items, linen and personal hygiene supplies.

The community had to communicate from door to door, for we had no land-line phones or cell phones. The people were sharing information through the streets that the church had water and other supplies for them. Imagine the excitement. "Get as much as you want back in the back," I told them. God supplied us with all that we needed. Thanks be to God.

We at Leona were helping the community. Although we had a gasoline shortage, we had enough gasoline to make trips to Meridian and to the Red Cross to receive supplies and water for the communities of Jasper County. God put Jasper County on the map to show that people of all races, creeds and colors could come out and help one another. It was awesome. The churches that I



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serve could see others come out and open their hearts, their minds, and pocketbooks to help and to share with us because we were without power, telephones, communications and water.

We took trucks to get other supplies to distribute. All the food in everyone's refrigerators was spoiled because all the power was out for two or three weeks, so we had to continue to call for water, food and supplies for this area. We were getting supplies from all over the nation. I just want to thank God for all of them. As soon as we were unloading one truck another truck was coming. We thank God for these people reaching out to us.

We made sure that the senior citizens got items in their homes. Boxes were sent to those that needed items the most, like babies and the elderly. Social workers took their clients food and items because we were trying to get things out where it was needed all over the counties of Jasper, Jones, Clarke, and Poplarville.

The work just continued to flourish. It was just great to see these people working together in brotherly love. The teams of doctors, nurses and lawyers came in from Rockford, Ill., to work in our area. They slept on the floor in William Chapel. It was amazing seeing these doctors and nurses using their hands for more than (seeing) patients in an office; seeing them work chain saws; laying tarps on top of roofs, using shovels, getting dirty, working with people, and comforting them, letting them know even though the storm of life is raging God is still there.

It was just great to know that God is still here and making a way for all of us. After taking those cold, cold showers at night singing in the shower, we learned how to appreciate the finer things in life. We learned how to look out and enjoy the stars and thank God. I thank God for letting us count the Milky Way and for all that we miss by all the lights we have.

With all the trucks that came to our area, we served over 12,000 people. Thanks be to God. God is good all the time.

— Rev. Arthur Lewis Jr., Paulding Charge

### The voice of... Rev. Roy Pearson

*Lord, we need to talk  
About this Christian walk  
I don't feel so zealous  
In fact I'm really jealous  
The neighbors have generators  
I'm burning up like an incinerator  
Trucks passed by today  
Filled with men on their way  
Back and forth they came  
Still everything's the same  
Hope you're ok with my fussing  
at least I'm not cussing  
I cooked on the grill  
My tummy had a thrill  
The water started flowing  
That was quite a showing  
I did get to flush  
and give my teeth a brush  
Thank you for the gift  
Gave my spirit a lift  
Lord, someone's at the door  
what else you got in store?  
My neighbor brought some ice  
Lord, you're so very nice!*

■ (Sept. 2, 2005) Words cannot describe how we all felt. I have talked to so many who feel emotions up and down the scale. Some are still dealing with the trauma. Our youth are especially dealing with it. We all feel so displaced and lost, for we feel this is a turning point. Life will never be the same as we knew it. I felt this same way after Camille. It changed our lives in South Mississippi. So will this.

— Rev. Roy Pearson, West Laurel UMC

### The voice of... Rev. Bert Felder

**W**e were asleep in my brother-in-law's home in Madisonville, La., when the phone rang. It was somewhere around 3 a.m. Sunday, Aug. 28. A mandatory evacuation of the parish had been ordered. We had attended a wedding shower and party for Sherry's daughter Sara on Saturday night. Plans for a late morning brunch were cancelled as out-of-town guests were called and encouraged to head home. By 8 a.m. Sherry and I were on our way to Summit to pick up my mother and then on to New Albany.

We had issued the invitation to all who did not have a place to go to join us. Fortunately we have the district parsonage and a house we have purchased for retirement. Little did we know that day that our house would become the "shelter of last resort" for 19 family members, 10 dogs, one cat, one hamster and five parakeets.

Sherry and I are not particularly fond of pets in the house, but love for family and their needs had to rule in that moment. To add to the difficulty, Sherry's mom ended up in the hospital with some problems related to her heart. But with a lot of patience on the part of everyone and much support with food and concern from the New Albany community, we survived. Our family members are now back home trying to recover from storm damage, and things have returned almost to normal for us. But everyone will remember Katrina and the Felder "shelter of last resort." I am sure that with time many stories will be told about those days, and some of them will be true.

— New Albany District Superintendent Rev. Bert Felder

## VOICES OF KATRINA

### The voice of... Rev. J. Michael Culbreth

When Hurricane Katrina hit the gulf coast, my aunt and her son chose to remain in New Orleans. While in their home, the storm removed their roof and they were left sitting in a house with a partial roof. They stayed in the house for about three days before moving to a shelter in Alexandria, La.

During this time we had no contact with Mrs. Griffin and her son, Eugene. After a few days we were able to contact them by cell phone and we discovered that they were okay. Our next concern was getting them out of Alexandria.

Because of my relationship with a United Methodist pastor in Alexandria, whose daughters are students at Rust College, I was able find help for my relatives. Pastor Ray went to the shelter and found Mrs. Griffin and Eugene. He allowed them to spend the night at his residence.

On Labor Day, Pastor Ray met me in Natchez with my aunt and nephew. I then transported them to my home in Holly Springs where they remained for three weeks. They are currently preparing to move into an apartment in Memphis and will perhaps never return to New Orleans.

This is an example of how good it is to be part of the Methodist connection. It's good to know that anywhere in the nation one can find a United Methodist friend to call upon in times of need. Praise God for the people called United Methodists.

— Rev. J. Michael Culbreth, *Asbury UMC, Holly Springs*

### The voice of... Jo Todd

My family attends Greenleaf UMC close to Coldwater. My granddaughter, Katelyn Allen, 10 years old, attends Oak Grove Elementary School in Hernando. She and her two younger brothers, Cary, eight, and Shawn Michael, six, were very concerned about the children affected by Katrina and what they could do to help them since they lived so far away.

On Monday after Katrina hit over the weekend, Katelyn and her mother Heidi went to Dr. Janice Barton, school principal, and discussed the situation. Before school was over that day, the gym had been sectioned off and labeled to be used as a drop-off point. Notes were sent home with children (with the emphasis on children's items), and the donations started coming. The announcement was made at Greenleaf that Rev. John Maki and Rev. Nell Maki had been contacted at Moss Point and that they were in great need of baby and children's items. In a short time, needed items were collected and taken to the school. Katelyn, Cary and Shawn Michael worked with their mother for two weeks to sort, label and pack boxes. Katelyn and Cary worked two Saturdays at the school while donations were coming in.

Rev. Mark McNair, Cockrum Charge, was in the process of filling a trailer headed for Moss Point to David Greer's church. Contact was made and on Sunday afternoon the trailer was loaded at Oak Grove School, and each box contained a personal note from the children letting the recipients know that God loves them.

How wonderful that these three pastors received help from churches they had previously served, Bro. John at Greenleaf, Sister Nell at Coldwater and Bro. Greer at Cockrum.

— Jo Todd, *Greenleaf UMC, Coldwater*

### The voice of... Peggy Hubert

In the early morning hours of Aug. 29, we waited for Hurricane Katrina. We were an unsuspecting people. It was not intended for the Mississippi Gulf Coast; it was first predicted to make landfall at Pensacola, but as it made its way into the gulf, it intensified rapidly and headed toward the shoreline below New Orleans. We knew we would be on the bad side of the hurricane and could expect tidal surge, yet we were not prepared for the full impact of what happened.

At 5 a.m. on that Monday the electricity shut down. I knew the storm was drawing near. In Biloxi, people stayed in their homes because they had sustained through Hurricane Camille, so surely they would endure anything. This was no Camille; this was far greater. As we whiled away the hours, listening to the constant roar of the winds, and from time to time looking out the windows, we had no idea just how severe this storm was. Just a few miles away people were fighting for their lives and many did not make it.

I watched *Pearl Harbor* on television Sept. 18 after touring our area and thought how many similarities there were. Pearl Harbor was unsuspecting, hit without notice, and devastation was massive. Katrina destroyed everything in its path for 300 miles. As we went back, and saw the magnitude of destruction on the Biloxi beachfront, we thought of a war zone. It will take months just to clear U.S. 90. We saw cars crushed under houses that had washed over them. The Ocean Springs-Biloxi bridge looked like a stack of dominos tumbled over. Casino barges were washed a quarter of a mile or more and landed on the opposite side of U.S. 90 or were tipped over into the water. What massive power could lift the megatons of weight and toss them like dice?

Wonderful old homes and churches are gone forever. Yes, they will be rebuilt, bigger and better, but we've lost a rich heritage. You can see straight through condominiums on the beach. Mostly, we saw broken boards, limbs and trees and bare slabs with steps leading to nowhere.

We knew the devastation in Biloxi, but this time we continued on our journey into our own neighborhood north of the bay, D'Iberville. Forty percent of

our church family lost homes to this storm. We knew this, but it had not really sunk in until we saw the devastation for ourselves. The knots in my stomach grew tighter as reality sank in. It was the same in D'Iberville as on the front beach. D'Iberville is on the bay and the same massive waves (30 feet in places) destroyed our lovely old hometown. The further down Racetrack Road we traveled, the greater the devastation. The war zone was back, but even worse than Front Beach. As we entered Langley Point, which is on a peninsula, there was nothing! Of all the grand homes that had been there, there was nothing; not one board, no furniture, just foundations and steps leading to nowhere.

By now the knots in my stomach had turned to nausea. It was too much, and yet I needed to see it to grasp the magnitude of what these people had lost. Everything! I had become impatient with some who returned daily for more and more from our church's distribution center. I am a compassionate person but had been distracted by the hard work of meeting the demands of people far and wide. Now I am humbled, and when I met someone in Wal-Mart this evening that had lost everything, I encouraged her to come to our church for supplies and told her how sorry I was for her loss. We all need a dose of reality when exhaustion and frustration seep in.

The Mississippi Gulf Coast will never be the same again, but the spirit of the people will remain. It stays now only in our hearts, but eventually the atmosphere will return. In the meantime, many people without homes, income and possessions need and appreciate the gracious help of the entire country as they have come to our rescue. It has been overwhelming!

My heart goes out to the United Methodist churches that were destroyed or sustained massive damage, and for all our United Methodist Women. UMCOR kits that we made and sent just months ago began arriving in our churches. All those I've spoken to said they cried when they saw the health kits. Who would have thought we would be the ones needing them!

Thank you, Lord, for touching my life today.

— Peggy Hubert, *president of Seashore District United Methodist Women*

### The voice of... Rev. Ron Barham

Jackie and Cecil and their three-month-old, Little Cecil, arrived at the shelter with some relatives who had hastily evacuated their New Orleans homes. Three weeks later, I took Jackie to Winona to pick up her mother, who having been located at a shelter in Baton Rouge after some uncertain searching, was riding a bus.

The grandmother was quite taken with how much Little Cecil had changed in the month since she had seen him. The grandmother told Jackie, "Baby, you ain't got a house. It's not even worth going back to look for anything. It's all gone...the whole block...gone." Jackie had already heard that she likely would have nothing left, but her mother's report seemed to make it final.

The parents and child had adjusted well to life in the dormitory and seemed to handle their losses and new circumstances without undue stress. Medical check-ups and shots were provided by a local doctor. Nurses and the Health Department came also. WIC provided nutritional services. Eventually, public housing was found for the family, including grandmother, and they moved to one of our Mississippi small towns.

A church group brought a combination baby



BARHAM

bed/playpen with a Winnie the Pooh design. Little Cecil had used it for three weeks. When Jackie was packing to leave, we told her she could take it with her.

About 10 minutes later, I noticed Jackie crying. She explained, "I had decorated the nursery back (pause) home (pause) with a Winnie the Pooh theme. It was so cute. Now it's gone. When you said we could keep this one, it's just too much...what I lost...but now a new start. It must have been an angel that brought that portacrib here."

Wood Institute opened as a shelter for Hurricane Ivan evacuees for one night and then three nights for Dennis. We had no idea we were opening for six and a half weeks for Katrina and Rita. We served 81 persons and had 88 volunteers from the area to help manage the shelter. Some 28 churches provided meals and other assistance. FEMA, Red Cross, Northeast Mississippi Medical Center, several businesses and various county and state agencies helped in a variety of ways.

— Rev. Ron Barham,  
*Wood Institute executive director*

# VOICES OF KATRINA

## The voice of... Paula Milo-Moultrie

I live in Waveland. I have been going there to work at and enjoy Gulfside Assembly and the gulf coast for more than a decade; my husband Ed for more than 20 years. We moved (from New York, where Ed worked for the General Board of Global Ministries) into our brand new home right after Hurricane Dennis, on July 11, 2005. Seven weeks later, Hurricane Katrina arrived.

I am Paula Milo-Moultrie, and this is my story.

### SUNDAY, AUG. 28, 2005

It's 5:30 a.m. We spent an anxious night watching The Weather Channel. We packed our cooler and two days' worth of clothes yesterday. We've got the checkbooks and insurance papers (just in case), flashlights, batteries, our cell phones and laptops. We're good to go.

7 a.m. – We had planned to be on the road by 6:30, but Marian Martin (the executive director of Gulfside Assembly) needed my husband to help her put the last two pieces of plywood on her windows and lock up and check the buildings. It's a beautiful day on the coast. You'd never know there was a storm out in the gulf.

We're going to Hattiesburg. The news reports say that even Hattiesburg will get tropical storm force winds and damage, but we have to go somewhere. Jackson is even further north and expected to get the wind as well, so it really doesn't matter how far you go. This storm is gonna be big... and bad.

### MONDAY, AUG. 29, 2005

11 a.m. – The electricity goes out. I didn't have a chance to call my mom again.

The wind speed is more than 100 miles. Ed keeps looking out of the window watching the Burger King next to the hotel get ripped apart. I keep telling him to be careful. (He's driving me crazy doing that.) We have a windup radio, so we can keep track of what's going on. It's not good. Not good at all.

### TUESDAY, AUG. 30, 2005

It's a beautiful day. The calm after the storm, I guess. The phones are out, the power is out and we have to get out of the hotel. Some people left late last night after Katrina blew through. How they made it in the dark, with no traffic lights, I'll never know. Other folks left this morning. We were going to try to stay one more night, but there is no water. No water means no flushing, and no flushing means . . . well, you know. We decide to try and find Marian. She's staying with a friend (Ora Franklin) who told us we could stay with her if we needed to.

### WEDNESDAY, AUG. 31, 2005

It's 6:30 a.m. I'm in line waiting to get a loaf of bread. It's not Rwanda, it's not Russia, it's Mississippi, USA. I've had no sleep, I look like a cross between death warmed over and something the cat dragged in, but I'm alive. It takes four hours, but I get the bread and other supplies.

The news reports are still skipping over Waveland and Bay St. Louis like we don't exist. They talk about New Orleans, and then go straight to Gulfport and Biloxi. Don't they realize that Waveland and Bay St. Louis got the eye of Katrina and were hit FIRST! I am soooooo frustrated!

### THURSDAY, SEPT. 1, 2005

It's 5:30 a.m. This time the line is for Wal-Mart. I get a voicemail from one of my friends telling me to

brace myself because he's seen on CNN that Waveland was basically blown off the map. I am momentarily dismayed, but I've no time to dwell on it. When you stand in line for bread, water and panties, your priorities become crystal clear. We're allowed two loaves of bread, two bags of ice, and two cases of water. There is no limit on anything else. You wouldn't think we were nearly 100 miles north of the gulf coast. I can't even imagine what Biloxi looks like, and New Orleans?

### FRIDAY, SEPT. 2, 2005

In a little while, we'll know if we still have a house. I spent part of the day yesterday doing a list for the insurance company. That nearly did me in because I kept thinking about all the things that cannot be replaced: my paternal grandmother's pure silver flatware, the pearls my parents gave me for my 21st birthday, the afghans my maternal grandmother

them there. We found some of our important papers and jewelry. It's a start.

Our trip was far from over, though. We still had to go to the coast. We had to see what it REALLY looked like.

After weaving amongst downed trees, power lines, and wreckage, we headed down Coleman Avenue (downtown Waveland). We'd heard it had been totally destroyed, but you just can't believe it until you see it. Places I know, places I was just getting used to. It's all gone. There are no words. Between this and my beloved city and state of New Orleans, Louisiana, I am one divided soul. I am Louisiana born and bred. It's almost more than I can take. Almost. I've got work to do here. I've got a home to repair. I've got a degree to get. Somehow, this is related to my calling. I know it. My home wasn't spared just so I could leave it. I've got a community, a city, and a state to rebuild. Like the old spiritual says, I "ain't got time to die."



Photo by Mike DuBose

knitted, our wedding album, and on and on and on. I can't take this.

Mrs. Martin has enough gas in her van to get down there and back. We have gas but will need it for later. I keep trying to prepare myself for the worst. I'm trying to wrap my mind around seeing a slab and rubble where my home used to be, but it's not working.

I just don't feel like it's gone. Not in my heart. We had gotten word that there were some homes still standing, but the destruction was so widespread. Even if it was standing, we'd lost everything inside, right? I started the trip with that in mind.

I have almost resigned myself to being okay as long as I am able to get a brick from the rubble. I'll be all right if I can just do that. I thought I was prepared for everything. I wasn't prepared to see... MY HOME STILL STANDING!

There was not a shingle missing. Ed took the plywood off the front door. We tried to unlock it, but it had swelled shut. He noticed the water line and warned me that we had had at least four feet of water in the house. He said it would be muddy, and that it would smell. We would look for a few specific items and leave. We walked around to the deck, took the plywood off the back door, opened it with our key and walked into our house.

There is no way for me to adequately describe what that moment was like. I am amazed at what we found. Although nearly all is gone, all is not lost. The water had moved my china cabinet a few feet, but the plug was still in the wall, and not one glass or plate was broken. The china coffee cups were on their sides in a row as if someone had gently placed

### SUNDAY, SEPT. 4, 2005

We're going back to see if we can find a few more things. We are taking water and supplies to our neighbors across the street. These two young boys rode out the storm in their attic. They watched our house so that the search and rescue team wouldn't break down our front door since we weren't there. It was the least we could do.

We cannot stay inside the house for long. The mold has set in, the walls are buckling and the smell will take your breath away. We found more of our important papers, our wedding album, my paternal grandmother's silver and three of my black angel figurines.

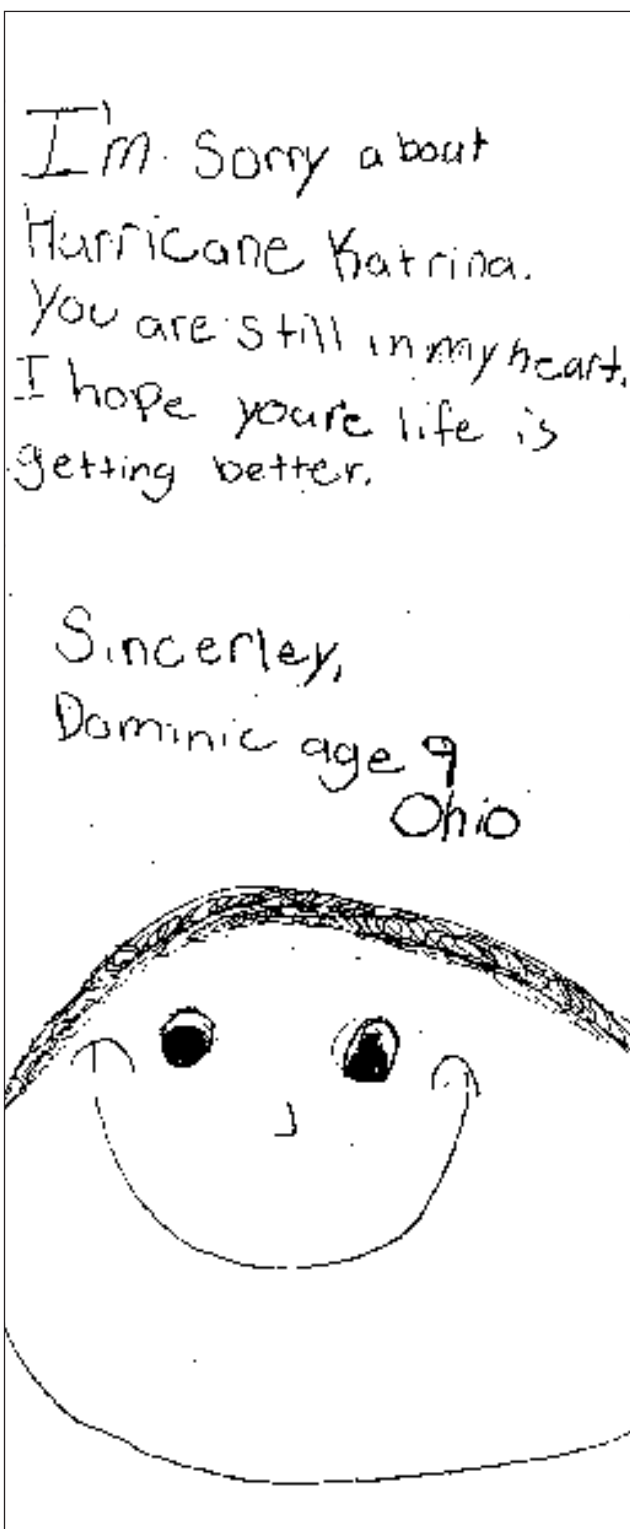
My sneakers are covered with mud. They are the only pair I have. I have to go to Wal-Mart, again. I wonder, for a split second, if it's okay for me to walk in with my dirty socks. I go inside without shoes in order to buy another pair. No one notices.

### MONDAY, SEPT. 5, 2005

It's Labor Day. Big deal. I've been laboring to survive every day. I can hardly believe it was only a week ago that Hurricane Katrina whipped through southern Mississippi.

We decide to make our run for the day. We go to Applebee's. From there it's on to Sam's Club (again). I buy a suitcase. It's ironic that I had over a dozen pieces of luggage, half a dozen storage bins and umpteen boxes of clothes, yet all I have now fits in

# VOICES OF KATRINA



## The voice of... Kathy

Dear Roberta,  
This is my favorite personal Katrina story. My response when people ask us what we need is that right now our needs are being taken care of but I anticipate that in the coming weeks we will need money. You see, God enabled our family, friends, neighbors and others to provide for each and every one of our daily needs and more.

Because of high insurance premiums we were underinsured. And then the insurance companies tried to get out of paying the homeowners' policies by saying all damage was caused by flood (which is a separate and often a lesser-paying policy). So my greatest concern was for our future financial situation. Especially since I was out of work for at least 60-90 days—maybe longer.

After going to Georgia to pick up a borrowed travel trailer to live in temporarily, we decided to go back to Ellisville for a day to pick up our boat, shop vac, and chain saw. We had left those things at the Harrisons'—the family that we stayed with through the storm.

Princy fixed us a nice lunch and then said she had something that she thought might belong to me. After washing slimy marsh mud off a ceramic piece, she laid the piece up on the counter. It DID belong to me! She had found this item in the debris in the back yard of her family's Bay St. Louis property there.

Berta, remember the ceramic Christmas village I had collected? Lots of village buildings

and hundreds of accessories including three church buildings.

There in front of us on her kitchen counter was a shiny, undamaged yellow building with a green roof. I looked at Royce and said, "And look which building it is!"

Everyone who hears this story says, "The church!" Wouldn't that have made a cute story? (How about wonderful—my words). God sent me a clear and important message—one I would recognize, understand and believe.

Which building in my Christmas village survived? The BANK! The bank survived!

The tears in our eyes that afternoon were not a sign of grief over what we lost, but relief and joy that God cares, not only about our daily needs but that God also knows and cares about our financial and material desires and dreams.

As I sit at the table booth in our borrowed travel trailer—set up on a co-worker's property—I can look up across the living area to a small TV shelf. There sits the shiny undamaged bank building. It is a constant reminder that God is very much alive, watching over us and working to restore our hopes and dreams.

I am praying that as you relate this story to your congregation and others that God's powerful love will touch another child of God with renewed hope when it is needed the most.

Praise God. God is forever faithful.

Love,  
Kathy

— Rev. Roberta Byram is pastor of Hayes-Barton UMC in Raleigh, N.C. Her sister Kathy is a resident of Bay St. Louis. Byram shared this letter with Bishop Ward. Used with permission.

**My greatest concern was for our future financial situation...**

## The voice of... Wanda Hurlbert

### KATRINA: THE UN-WELCOME GUEST

Twas August 29th, two thousand and five,  
When the hurricane named Katrina decided to arrive.  
Uninvited and unwanted, her visit useless to protest,  
was headed our way as an un-welcome guest.

Her presence was felt all over the state;  
Yet the coast and its neighbors she really did implicate.  
Katrina came early in the morning.  
She stayed entirely too long.  
She was powerful and turbulent,  
destructive and headstrong.

To Katrina it didn't matter whose homes she invaded—  
the rich or the poor,  
they were all downgraded.  
No matter the buildings, whether large or small,  
Katrina inflicted her havoc,  
as a lion would maul.

Her winds pounded and slammed,  
uprooting homes and trees.  
Her wrath and her fury left no one at ease.  
The waters churned and flooded  
As the storm surge rose higher,  
people climbed into their attics,  
Wondering what would transpire.

People swam for their lives  
Or clung tightly to trees.  
Some climbed to the rooftops;

Some prayed on their knees.  
The 23rd Psalm came quickly to mind;  
The Lord's Prayer was recited for  
God's protection to mankind.

For hours and hours Katrina battered our coast,  
Destroying those things that mattered the most.  
Historic old buildings we thought that would last,  
Reminders of our heritage and relics of our past.

Some people stayed; some people fled.  
Now many are missing, while others are dead.  
Katrina had no feelings for the human race,  
Leaving most everything and everyone in utter disgrace.

Our national and state leaders  
Met with the mayors of our coast,  
Deciding on ways to help us the most.  
The policemen, the firemen, the medics,  
The Armed Forces and the Guard  
Gave assistance and protection  
Since Katrina struck us so hard.

Kind citizens and churches,  
The Red Cross and FEMA, too,  
Provided help and relief to carry us through.  
There was ice and water, clothing and food,  
Money and even counseling,  
To overcome a depressed mood.

Providing news and visual coverage that was unbelievable to our eyes

Was WLOX, the *Sun Herald*, and the *Bay Press*.  
They deserve the Nobel Prize –  
Reporting information too numerous to recall,  
Yet so very important and useful to us all.

Our community was diverse and included many cultural traditions;  
Since Katrina's visit most places are beyond recognition.  
Devastation and debris have replaced many structures and sites,  
Yet the lighthouse remains as a symbol of hope and light.

Our community of people will regain their composure,  
Re-group and re-build and soon bring some closure.  
Memories of the past cannot be erased  
But can provide insight and vision that we all need to embrace.

To the volunteers and workers who came from out of state,  
Bringing food and supplies to help us recuperate,  
We thank you so much from the bottom of our hearts  
For your time in helping us to make a brand new start.

Katrina didn't know she couldn't "keep them Coast folks down."

They're up and working, from sun-up till sun-down.  
Soon we will be much better than before.

Katrina will be a memory.

The Coast we will restore.

— Wanda Hurlbert, Handsboro UMC, Gulfport

# VOICES OF KATRINA

## The voice of... Rev. Curtis Bray

The morning started early for me. I was up and out the door to meet Dickie Gossett at his house a little before 6 a.m. We were headed to the coast to carry supplies to those in need (bought with money sent by our friends from Vickery UMC in Greensboro, N.C.). We traveled south on Hwy. 45 to Buckatunna to meet Rev. Jack Wooten, who serves Refuge UMC and Crossroads UMC in the Lucedale area, and a group from Minerals Springs UMC in North Carolina. It had been 30 days since the storm, and this was Jack's thirtieth trip down to help the victims.

Dickie and I were all eyes, ready to see the devastation that Katrina had caused. Much to our amazement, most of the way down, all that we could see was some trees that were blown down and an occasional blue tarp on a roof. However, the closer we got to Gulfport, the more we began to see. Most of the businesses along Hwy. 49 had been damaged heavily – many were still not open. Others had signs, almost



Photo by Mike DuBose

A Santa Claus decoration stands amid storm debris following Hurricane Katrina.

begging for people to work – “guaranteed weekly checks, flexible hours, great benefits immediately.”

As we headed west on I-10, the whole scene changed drastically. Huge steel billboards that rise high into the air to advertise casinos and other attractions on the coast seemed to be twisted with the ease that a child might bend a pipe cleaner. Miles of pine trees were dying – a very strange sight. We decided that they must have been attacked by pine beetles before the storm but were to learn later they died from salt water that had made its way that far inland.

The further west we drove toward Waveland, the worse it got. Huge steel pipes that held up the billboards had been snapped as if just twigs. We saw “camps” of mobile homes and travel trailers that had become the homes for many people. We saw the largest tent retail store in the world – a Wal-Mart that had been destroyed was now selling basic items and groceries beneath what appeared to be circus tents.

As we headed to the Waveland area, our eyes got bigger as the devastation got worse. The roads were still covered with dried mud, and the sides of the roads were littered with cars and trucks that did not make it out. More than 200 of these vehicles had been moved by their owners to higher ground on the highway in hopes that they would be safe from the flooding that might occur. Many had been removed from the road, but the number turned upside down, twisted and mangled was still great. What used to be homes and

businesses were now empty shells covered in a grayish-brown layer of dirt and mud.

We left Hwy. 604 and headed for Clermont Harbor UMC just west of Waveland. We turned down roads that seemed to get smaller and more congested because of piles of rubble that lined them. And then we turned into the area where the church was located, approximately four blocks from the gulf coast. When we got out of our truck, we were met by a group from United Methodist churches in Kansas. They have committed to send 15-20 each week for the next six months to help with the clean-up.

Dickie and I walked to the front steps of the church to survey the area – that's all that remained of the church! No words were said as we turned and looked at an area that once was populated by more than 600 homes. Now, as far as we could see the land was covered with wood and debris – no homes to be found.

A closer look revealed a refrigerator near the top of a tree. Someone's Santa Claus yard ornament was lodged in the limbs of another tree we saw. As we looked around, we stared at an electric transformer at the top of a pole that had defeated the storm, and we remembered that the water had gone over the top of it. We saw where people had painted their house numbers on plywood; FEMA notes were written on trees; one sign said “May God bless us.”

Remnants of the lives of people we did not know lay everywhere – children's toys, bicycles, lawn mowers, cars and trucks wrapped around trees.

We saw slabs of concrete dotted with heavy poles that looked like skeletal remains because the beautiful homes that once sat on them were now gone. If you listened, you could hear a few people talking as they worked to try to bring back some sense of normalcy to the area. Occasionally a chain saw would scream as it cut through the unimaginable amount of rubble on the ground. One pastor from Kansas was in tears as he described his first sight of this area.

We headed back to distribute the supplies we had carried: Gatorade, insect repellent, Lysol cleaner, Pine-Sol cleaner, and toilet paper. We gave some to people we met on the road. We stopped at one home where people were living in a pop-up camper and a small RV. They would only take what they needed – no more. They wanted to make sure others had a chance to receive too. We took the remaining supplies to the local distribution center where people came daily to receive much needed items.

On our way, we saw a huge tugboat that had been deposited on a landscape that was overwhelmed with more vehicles and small boats. We saw Pearlinton UMC that had been moved from its foundation and lay twisted near the road. As we unloaded, we saw state trooper vehicles from Virginia, police cars from different parts of the country, and catastrophe teams that had never seen the Mississippi Gulf Coast before – all

had come to help.

Much of our return trip was quiet and solemn as we constantly viewed evidence of Katrina's trail – sporadic at times, but never seeming to end until we were north of Meridian.

When we first arrived at Jack's home, we gathered in his carport to get gas and other supplies. I smiled as I

## The voice of... Rev. Larry Bowyer

### BEEN THERE, DONE THAT

*Our eyes have seen such terrible scenes.  
Inside, our hearts are wrecks.  
Those horrid sights, those wrongs not rights,  
Raise hairs up on our necks...  
Been there, done that.  
There's muck and mess and mire,  
A coast is gone entire.  
There are whole towns just all knocked down.  
Those dogs are dead where we were led.  
Been there, done that.  
But in the mud, the putrid crud,  
I see some signs of hope,  
For people dare and many share –  
To the drowning ones, a rope.  
Been there, done that.  
And as for you, what will you do  
With these our hurting friends?  
May it be said you raised the dead?  
Been there, done that?  
And will we sing upon our way  
With singers gone before,  
Mine eyes have seen God's glory,  
On the Mississippi shore?*

– Pastor Larry Bowyer, Easton UMC, Easton, Kan.

■ Bowyer volunteered in the Bay St. Louis area. In an October letter to Bishop Hope Morgan Ward, he wrote, “We in Kansas are recruiting; many of us intend to return. If we continue to be of some small help, we shall praise God. Our little Easton church has sent a member on each of our first four (Kansas Volunteers in Mission) teams and hope to send more! We bring back word of your faith and courage in your time of great adversity. Please know we pray for you all daily.”

saw three six-packs of Anheuser-Busch products. Without hesitating, I reached down and got a can. Dickie soon followed, and so did the youth leader from Mineral Springs. As we laughed, talked, and enjoyed the company, we took our cans with us.

In the middle of a national crisis, Anheuser-Busch had stopped its beer production and filled millions of white cans labeled “Drinking Water” with much needed purified water for those on the coast. At times like this, we must remember that everyone is touched by this crisis, and many, many people are helping.

As I awoke this morning, I wanted to complain because I had to cut my lawn. But before I could say anything, I remembered, and I thanked God that I had a lawn to cut. Pastor Jack had reminded me that God does not cause situations. But He promised that He would be with us in the middle of all this and would bless us. Let's never forget that! As you read this in a comfortable place, please remember to “praise God from whom all blessing flow.” Amen!

– Rev. Curtis Bray, Shaeffer's Chapel UMC

# VOICES OF KATRINA

## The voices of... Rev. Willis and Brenda Britt

Gabriella, our seven-year-old grandchild, loves the beach. This summer, we spent three days together at Biloxi beach. She loved the experience and especially our little Arlean Hall "apartment," as she referred to it.

When her father began talking with her about Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath, she listened very carefully. He helped her identify the location by referring to the place she had stayed on the beach.

Hearing it all, she responded, "Daddy, go to the closet and get my purse. There is \$15 in it; send it to the people. And Daddy, there was a beautiful light in our 'apartment.' Buy them a light! They need something beautiful."

Brenda and I had not noticed the light. Gabriella took note as children often do. She focused on the beautiful light then and now. Indeed, a child shall lead them.

— West Jackson District Superintendent Rev. Willis and Brenda Britt



Photo by Woody Woodrick

Arlean Hall in Biloxi is still standing, but the first floor was battered by Hurricane Katrina.

Milo-Moultrie, from page S5

one piece. No excess baggage here, folks. It's amazing what you can let go of when you no longer have it. I'm in no rush to buy clothes and shoes and things. Food is enough.

I'm starting to get tired. That happens quickly these days. It's not regular fatigue like after you've worked out hard or done yard work or something. It's kind of an all-over pressure, part heaviness, part numbness. I feel like I'm in a slow thaw. I think reality is beginning to set in.

**TUESDAY, SEPT. 6, 2005**

This vacillation is wearing me down. On one hand, I'm glad to be alive and have a roof over my head, a place to sleep and food to eat. On the other, I can't stop thinking about all that I've lost. I feel guilty for having an orange, having options (I can live anywhere, I don't have to rebuild, I can rebuild, sell, and move, etc.). Others are not as fortunate. I hear horror stories on TV and have to turn it off.

So many need so much. Is this survivor's guilt? I realize intellectually that I have not lost everything. I didn't lose my life or my faith. Just everything I own, some of which cannot be replaced. Lord, I'm tired.

**WEDNESDAY, SEPT. 7, 2005**

Since we stop getting cell phone service about 15 minutes after leaving Hattiesburg, we put off going back for another day. I'm secretly glad because I don't like going back. It's starting to get to me. I'm tired of this already, and there's such a long way to go. I'm tired of seeing the trash, the twisted metal, the brokenness, the desolation. I hate it all. I want my house back, I want my life back, and I want to feel secure again.

**THURSDAY, SEPT. 8, 2005**

In the afternoon, we get a call that Oprah is broadcasting from Waveland. It's almost funny. I sent her an e-mail

about Gulfside and never received a response. Mrs. Martin had sent some information about Gulfside and received a polite letter declining whatever was being requested. Oprah never had a clue about Gulfside Assembly or Waveland, Miss., before, but where is she today? In my adopted hometown. And where am I? Stuck 90 miles away waiting for someone to decide if my house gets bulldozed. I could just scream! Hey, I wanted Waveland to be put on the map but not like this.

**FRIDAY, SEPT. 9, 2005**

Not too long after we start cleaning out the house, our builder comes by. He tells us he has people in the area and will send some over to help us. Two young women and four young men help us get the furniture out. One of the men tells me how beautiful the china cabinet is. It is beautiful. It is ruined. It has to go. As soon as they begin to move the china cabinet, it falls apart. I have to turn away. I know it's a small thing in the grand scheme of it all, especially in comparison to the people in New Orleans, but it still hurts.

Moving from New York to Waveland, we had some 487 "pieces" and more than 60 boxes. And yet, what's left fits in six small cardboard boxes. Ed remarks on how disheartening it is to see your life laid out on the front lawn, dirty, smelly, rotted, and broken. I agree.

Later in the afternoon, we find out that *Dateline* on NBC is going to mention Gulfside Assembly. FINALLY! The nation will know what I've been trying to tell people. This beautiful, historical landmark does exist, was destroyed and has to be rebuilt. My little city has made the news in a positive way under negative circumstances. Thank you, Jesus. Marian, Ora, Ed and I watch the show with mixed emotions. We know every place Stone Philips is talking about (just like we knew where Oprah was).

I get irritated when people say that Waveland was nearly "wiped off the

map." That burns me up. We have not been "obliterated." Yes, there is extensive damage in much of Waveland and Bay St. Louis, but people are there and homes are standing. I'm sick of hearing how bad it is; I KNOW how bad it is. Nobody has to tell me that 90 percent of Waveland was destroyed, I've seen it! So let's stop talkin' about what has happened, and get on with making it happen — rebuilding Waveland and Gulfside Assembly for the next generation.

**SUNDAY, SEPT. 11, 2005**

I washed off the three black angels I found. I couldn't get all the dirt off, but that's okay. An angel with tarnished wings is still an angel.

After the angels, I began to wash and polish Meme's fine silver flatware. While doing this, the words of an old song came to mind. I seem to be able to relate to most any spiritual these days. I sit on a bench on the front porch, swaying to the rhythm of the chorus

*If I have my ticket Lord, Can I ride?*

*If I have my ticket Lord, Can I ride?*

*If I have my ticket Lord, Can I ride?*

*Ride right up to heaven right now.*

**MONDAY, SEPT. 12, 2005**

We finally received a response from FEMA. They approved an initial \$2,000 for emergency lodging, with other assistance pending, and deposited it into our account. Hallelujah! We're turning the corner on this ride.

**TUESDAY, SEPT. 13, 2005**

I feel like I have no past. I hate this. Why me? Why us? Why did we move to Waveland? We could have stayed in New York, or moved to Georgia and been near Mom. Maybe we shouldn't go back. All these questions and no answers.

Ed went through the wedding album. There was very little we could save. God, the pictures we've lost.

**WEDNESDAY, SEPT. 14, 2005**

SUCCESS! The sweat and tears pay off. We find several of Ed's original paintings in good shape. We thought we'd lost them all. We find one bin of photos that seem to be untouched. I think I have a wedding photo or two in there. (Yes, I will take the time to put them in albums now.)

**SATURDAY, SEPT. 17, 2005**

Prior to Aug. 29, I was struggling to identify my call. My call to ministry, that is. Strangely enough, at some point in the past few weeks I stopped struggling. My daily efforts to stay alive and put one foot in front of the other have brought about a blessed quietness, stillness. What I am to do will be revealed to me soon enough. It may be a complete 360 degree turn to something else. Or, it may be to continue on my current path. I really don't know, but I don't worry about it any more.

**SUNDAY, SEPT. 18, 2005**

I read the meditation for today in The Upper Room. The reading for the day is Ecclesiastes 3: 1-8: *For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven...* I am assaulted by the layers of meaning this passage hold for me today. It is no accident that this passage came to me. The message is clear: No matter what time it is, God has a plan. Verses 9 and 10, especially 10, also speak to me.

*What gain have the workers from their toil? I have seen the business that God has given to everyone to be busy with.*

Yes, I have seen the business that God has given to ALL of us to be busy with, and I trust you have seen it as well. The business is the rebuilding, reawakening and renewal of the homes, lives, souls and cities decimated by hurricane Katrina.

— Paula Milo-Moultrie, Waveland