

The City I Call Home

by Tracey Flemings-Davillier

The destruction caused by Hurricane Katrina has been well chronicled. The utter devastation of property, loss of life, and displacement of thousands of people has made a profound impact on this country. Yet, the story goes on. The lives of people affected in Louisiana and Mississippi has taken on a new dimension I call "dis-connectedness". Having lost everything thousands of people are missing the intangibles of community and fellowship. Tracey Flemings-Davillier aptly describes this loss in the following article. We at IN A WORD miss our "connections" as well and we pray that in the months ahead old bonds can be restored and new ones found. -the Editor

On Friday, August 26th, when I awoke, I had no idea that my life and the lives of so many people was about to change forever. I had never lived or worked in another city and hadn't seriously considered the possibility. The news that Hurricane Katrina was headed directly to New Orleans seemed to come out of nowhere and took many of us by surprise. Nevertheless, not wanting to take the chance and given that we have two small children and just like so many other years in the past, my family gathered up a few pieces of clothing for what we thought would be a 3 or 4 day trip to Houston. Things were different this time.

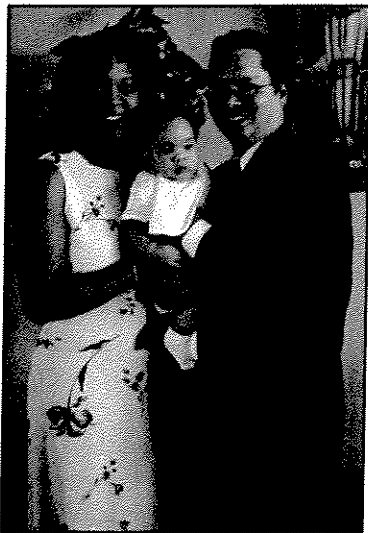
The days following the Hurricane seemed surreal. The stories on the television, the e-mails and the stories told by family and friends were disheartening. Some without the means to evacuate struggled to survive in the City I called home. Some who were trapped in their houses escaped the volatile wrath of the flood waters in the City I call home. Some had been separated from their loved ones ...while others

evacuated to distant cities no longer called the City home. I began to wonder if the City I had called home since birth could still be my home. Two months later, I'm feeling a need for the home that I knew, the City that I call home.

But, it's not merely the City that is my home, it's the people, my family, my friends, the church

where I was baptized as a baby. It is the place where I met my high school sweetheart and the church where I married him. It's the bonds that I developed as a little girl with my grandfather (who is deceased), grandmother and mother who are the wind beneath my wings. It's the place where I gave birth to my two children and the church where they were baptized; the same priest who presided over my marriage, blessed my house and baptized my children. It's the place where I attended Catholic elementary and high schools and the Catholic university that I attended; my first and only house. It is the place of closeness of a family with aunts whose cooking can make you go back for seconds and thirds, uncles who love the Saints (despite the odds) and a host of cousins and childhood friends with whom I shared my childhood. It is my girlfriends with whom I've shared nights out on the town, the gospel mass at St. Maria Goretti, the diverse culture, the Creole, Cajun, French, Italian and Soul food, the historical ambience of the neighborhoods, Mardi Gras, Jazz Fest, Audubon Zoo, the French Market, the French Quarters, and so on.

While many people choose to move away from the place where they grew up, I only evacuated from New Orleans and did not make a choice to permanently relocate. Although many people for various reasons have now chosen to relocate to other places after the Hurricane (and I don't blame them for choosing to do so), I want to go back home. I have a need to feel connected to the life that was mine and that was abruptly taken away in many ways. Many have said, while trying to comfort the evacuees, "You have your life and you should be grateful for that." I am and I thank God everyday for my many blessings, but I think some people fail to realize that a life is more than the physical body which people see on the outside. Our physical body embodies our spirit, which is developed



Tracey and husband John at baptism of second child.

throughout the course of our lives by the people and events that are or were a part of our lives. While tangible things which many of us have lost in the Hurricane can be replaced, the memories that are tied to special things are what make those things important and irreplaceable – a wedding dress or wedding book, a child's Christening gown or baby book, a keepsake or memento of a special day or time in our lives, and items passed on from generation to generation – lost forever. Such things cannot simply be replaced.



The retirement community in Bay Saint Louis, Mississippi. All members have had to relocate to various parts of the USA

Even though I have lost so many aspects of my life both tangible and intangible, I want to reconnect with the people and places in New Orleans in hopes of feeling at home again. While I realize that life will be different in the City I call home, it is still my home, and there's just no place like home.



The bridge between Bay Saint Louis and Pass Christian was destroyed. Families and communities have been likewise disconnected. The enormity of this loss cannot be measured.



Many of the elderly and retired in New Orleans lost everything. Merian Gross pictured above had to evacuate to Houston and Dallas. She now lives in Washington DC with her granddaughter Dionne (center) and daughter Donna (right). Like many other retired people Ms. Gross lost more than her possessions...she lost "home".



St. Mary's Academy and St. Augustine High School in New Orleans were so badly damaged that they cannot reopen until next September. These freshman students at St. Mary's were in school for only three weeks when Katrina hit. Students are now found throughout the USA



Tracy and John with family and friends after baptism of first child. Her home parish is St. Maria Goretti Church in New Orleans East. They are now "dis-connected".