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Photodocumentary of Returning Ninth Ward Residents

Brian Rosa

In conducting the resident surveys in October of 2006, I was deeply touched by the stories we were told. There was an overwhelming resonance in what people felt they needed to tell us, much of which did not fit within the rubric of a quick and empirical survey. In the beginning of the spring semester, with the support of the Cornell Council for the Arts, I conducted follow-up interviews in an attempt to capture some of these stories. Between March 17 and 27, 2007, I interviewed eighteen residents with the help of Ben Phelps-Rohrs, who assisted me with audio recording and editing. Our aim was to respectfully document residents' personal narratives of struggle, resilience, and rebuilding. I see the photographic portraits and interview transcripts as inextricably linked, and this project was my first foray into social scientific methods incorporating photography and audio recording. I worked with residents to create collaborative portraits that told stories about their experiences with Katrina. I asked them to show me an object or space around their home that reminded them of their experience during or since the storm or something they were able to save. These photographs and edited audio recordings were exhibited widely at conferences and in galleries in the United States and England between 2007 and 2008.

Betty Morgan (Lower Ninth Ward)

It just so happens we have this big picture of my mother, and that's the only thing I have of her left. It didn't get messed up, I thank God for it. I keep it in my house to remind me that I want to get back in there.

The recovery process is real slow, and it's depressing. You look around and you see why things aren't going a little faster, because we're in the United States and nothing gets done—it's sad.

I have some walls up and I bought some doors, I buy them a couple at a time when I can. I'm a single parent right now, so I gotta take care of the kids, and I still have to pay a house note that I'm not living in.

I see people living under the bridge saying that they need somewhere to stay—I can't help because I barely have somewhere to stay. They say the mayor, governor, and all them can help you. I don't understand what kind of power these people have and they don't do anything. Are you just cold-hearted like that?

It's not about black, it's not about white, it's not about Creole. Whatever you are, it's not about that, it's about love for us—period. Obviously, somebody somewhere is missing that.

It's gonna be a while before the neighborhood gets back to where it was, with the slow response that we're getting. On this end of the city, in the Lower Ninth Ward, they really didn't want us back. But the Lower Ninth Ward is a wonderful place. People think it's not, but it is. You just have to come and see. It's not the Ninth Ward; it's some of the people that are in it.

Before the storm it was nice. I had a beautiful home, I was comfortable, my neighbors would wave at one another and say hello. Now I have four neighbors and we keep our eyes out for one another. We are in a deserted place right now. It's gotten so I've seen raccoons walking around.

My four kids, there's a strain on them. They don't know what parents go through, they think we're supermoms and superdads. Well right now I guess I'm playing both. They're always yelling, "Ma!" They don't know Ma is as broke as all our doors. They expect me to pull off this miracle, and I try my best. It might keep me in the hole for a minute, but I try to pull it off. My baby girl understands what's going on, but the kids don't really know the stress and the problems that we're having. Just living is hard, and they don't understand that. It's a lot of pressure. At the same token, I try to make them think that it's an okay world right now.

I was excited to see our gas station on St. Claude reopen. It's coming, slowly but surely. Especially on St. Claude, it was a dead area. Just to see them is a blessing. One time I had to drive to Chapitoulas just to get some ordinary things that I used to be able to go to a corner store and just get. I thank those people. I don't even know who they are, but I thank them for coming to this side of the St. Claude Avenue Bridge and trying to give us a boost. Anything that opens around here gives us a boost—it says we're coming back.

I had rental property on the other side of Claiborne, but I don't have it anymore. The water washed those two buildings away. That was my main income. I gotta bust my tail. When my employers say "overtime," I gotta say "when?"

We are in the USA. We can go to Iraq and build them something, but we can't build here? I don't understand it. That's scary. We just gotta pray on it, I guess. We'll be all right.

Charles Miles, Sr. (St. Claude Neighborhood, Upper Ninth Ward)

Right now in my community, within a five-block area, most of the people have come back. A few people in between have gutted their houses but haven't come back yet.

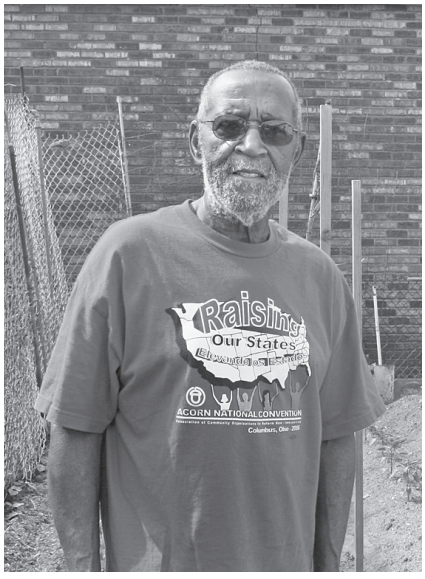
I think if there was a faster process with the Road Home Program, a lot more people would be back. What's happening now is just a joke. If there was a process to make the people's money move faster and they could come do what they need to do, things would be better.

Most of the people in my neighborhood are doing their own houses. You saw what my house looked like. I did all my own work, spent all my money, and am just about broke right now.

With the Road Home, I said from the beginning that they should have never put the money in the governor's hands. They should have made some kind of arrangement with the banks so that you could go draw it out.

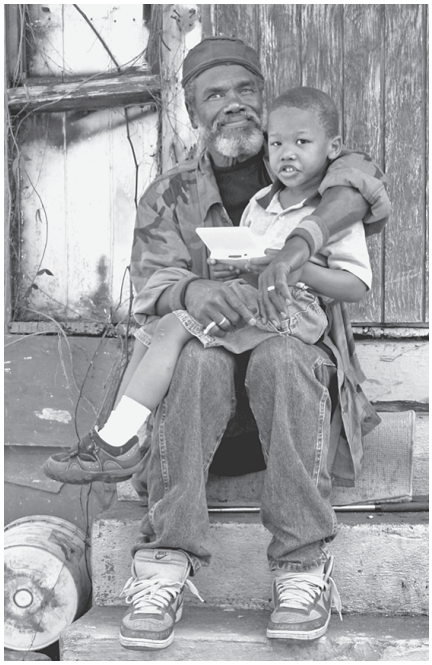
We filled out an application about six months ago, we got a letter to go down and be interviewed. Three months have passed, and I haven't heard from them since. If I wanted to make a mortgage, I could go to the bank today, fill out all of the information, and within a week they are going to tell me whether I'm approved or disapproved. This is what's holding up a lot of people in the neighborhood.

When I came back, it looked like a war zone. I tried to come back right after the storm, and the National Guard stopped us on the freeway and told us that we couldn't go there. They finally let us go at five thirty, and we had to go about five or ten miles an hour through the city. When I got around here, I shined my flashlight on my house and my daughter's house. The waterline was so high on the house that the emergency workers put their markings on the roof. At my house, I had to kick the door open. Everything I touched or moved fell apart. My refrigerator was full, and it ended up on top of the stove.



The most important things I lost were pictures. My den is twelve by twenty-four feet, and I had pictures all around the whole wall. I took the pictures down and left them in plastic bags on the sofa. I left three pictures on the wall. The ones on the wall stayed. The rest were ruined. Everything else was material to me.

Charlie Jackson (Lower Ninth Ward)



This place looked like hell. It was really destroyed. But the trailers being able to be at your house is the movement now. Right now we're living up in there, seven of us in that one little trailer.

The water got up to that One Way sign out there on the street. I know, because they rescued us on a boat out of this attic here, four of us. My son-in-law, my brother-in-law, and another friend from down the street.

*My vision of [living in trailers] is that God has made a way for us to get close as families. You can't pass and can't touch and all that. It brings a unity that wasn't there. I know it wasn't there. "*My *room!" Hell, we're all in the room.*

I haven't even gotten into a church, man. We started sitting in for a couple of Sundays, but—I just don't see building three or four churches in one neighborhood and not one house for people to come to this church. That don't go with me. I'm not going to contribute to something that don't work out in my head.

We need to fix these houses. You can come through anywhere in the neighborhood; you got people just sitting and waiting—like me, really. And then you don't know the next step. You would think some of these officials—like when we first came in here—would have at least been here to guide us through mold, any infections, and different stuff that might still be here.

I had to borrow from a lady to put my daughter's trailer next door, because we couldn't put the trailers in front of the house. Lucky my son had bulldozed this one out while we were in Tennessee. They need to get these houses going, man. It's sad, it's really pitiful.

I think [the rebuilding of the Lower Ninth Ward] is coming along good for the people that have a little money, 'cause they got a lot of people. You can go back this way, back around St. Maurice, and you can rent a home anywhere if you've got the money. But these people who've got money, they did rehab these buildings. In six months, this should have been done. There's no doubt in my mind. They can build a whole subdivision in Houston in six months, so what are they waiting on?

It's really messed up, but I think all of this stuff comes from that White House, the head there—it dribbles down from up there. And it's been bad, it's proven to be bad. I mean, those people there are messing with people in another doggone country. They went over there and killed the man, took his country. What's to stop him from coming and taking my house?

I heard [Governor Blanco] say last night that there's a lot of things she wanted to do, but the Republicans are throwing dirty things in the way. She's saying they're doing it to the people, but that's me! I'm the people. A guy is out there getting greedy with the money, and that's what politicians are. They don't care about the little man, and we're the little man right now. This Ninth Ward really little, man.

Okay, we got a government and a democracy we're living in, and I've been in the pen four times. But at a point God gave me enough knowledge to come up and know that a family is more important than the street life I was living. So now I'm trying to get into the system, and the system rejected me. I'm doing all the right things. I know that because when I found out what it meant to have a home was when Katrina happened. We came out of the Desire projects, on welfare and all this stuff, and could buy a home. It was so simple—what could be the problem now that I'm there? I have what y'all say we need! I'm a citizen. I started voting, and I'm raising my family. I can't get the problem in my head with this system, this government. It's too bad, man.

This piece of junk—I've been paying these extreme energy bills because I was never able to insulate it right or fix it right. I couldn't do that. With SSI [supplemental security income] all I could do was pay my house note. And from what I can understand, they're going to give the people who paid their loan out a chunk of money where they can help themselves. And the ones who are still paying house notes will get bits and pieces. I don't get it. I've been paying it fifteen years—we was out there in Tennessee paying it.

Another part of it is we refinanced right before the storm. For fifteen years we were carrying flood insurance in a place where you don't need it. When we refinanced right before the storm, they said we didn't need it. It's so deep down here.

David Lee Fountain (St. Claude Neighborhood, Upper Ninth Ward)

When I came back from staying at the convention center from Wednesday to Friday, I told everybody that we're going to have to go back and put our houses back together. If they left us down here to die, they're not going to do anything to help us.

So they let us back. My house had water in it, so I told a trooper that I need a place to stay. He said that they could take me back to Houston. I said I just came from Houston. So I just moved in; it was all on me.

A lot of people said that they were not coming back. What I do now is I cut the grass for all of the houses and make believe that everyone on this block came back.

You could see that I would be real mad if Governor Blanco would want to give me something that I would have to put into a contractor's hand, with me doing my work myself. They say I can't do anything to my house until I get my money for the contractor. I don't understand that because when I got my mold check, I did all my work myself. I took all the Sheetrock out and all the mold that I saw. That

was $5000, which was the remainder of the money I needed to pay the house off with. Now I don't owe any money on it—so I don't see how Miz Blanco is saying what she's saying.

My daughter is a school principal, and the kids had broken into the school. The police came to arrest them and asked her what she wanted them to do. She found out that the kids had nowhere to stay. She said that she didn't want to do anything with them, that they just broke in because they needed somewhere to stay.

In a lot of cases, the children came back home and some of them couldn't find their parents. Some of them will never find their parents. The same thing happened during Hurricane Betsy. What got the people separated was when rescue crews came to get the children first, then another crew came and got the rest of the family. During Betsy the city government and the National Guard were able to do more. I didn't see anything coming down my street, even though the water was five foot five.

[Regarding the photo,] my house is the band house—I call it Musician's City. I put some pictures on the website, but I'm not as into my account as I was. My mannequin is on top, she's been with me for a few years before Katrina. I was gonna throw her out, but when I heard they were going to put the [Musician's] Village across the street, I said I'd keep her and she'd be a part of me. I kind of fell in love with her—her name's Rita. I have Katrina outside, but I don't let her see me talking to Rita. I programmed Rita so that she'll do what I tell her. I tell her, "Rita, look to the left" [mannequin's robotic head turns to the left]. *"Now look to the right." What I don't like about her is she always says no!*

The second building on North Robertson Street—that's the one the president built. I won't let nobody tell me he didn't build it, because it was filmed by CNN

news. I can show him raising it up. I'm not gonna let anybody tell me he didn't build it. That might be all he did.

Deandra Carr (Lower Ninth Ward)

I've been in the Ninth Ward since 1980, and I will be in the Ninth Ward till the day I die.

We evacuated before Katrina hit. We got out that Sunday, so I was blessed enough not to experience some of the other things that people had experienced. The biggest tragedy was that evacuation was normal for us—we live where we are always affected by hurricanes. It's kind of like going on a couple of days' vacation; you always go, but you come back. But things changed when the levees broke. So I hear a lot of people say, "The hurricane did this, the hurricane did that." We lived through hurricanes. I've been through Betsy, I've been through Camille, and it was not Katrina that has us in the situation we are in today—it was the breach of the levees, the mismanagement of the funds that were supposed to secure us from the waters.

A lot of times people got upset when you say that it happened the way it happened because somebody is trying to change the infrastructure of the city, and we don't have the people back because they don't have anywhere to live.

We're members of ACORN, which is really a positive force in the Lower Ninth Ward. We're members of the Holy Cross Neighborhood Association; this area is adjoined to a historic area, Holy Cross. And we're a member of the Welcome Home Committee—it's a new group where we ourselves, the residents, have come together to say, Welcome home. We help each other help ourselves by picking up a hammer; you paint my house, we'll help you work on yours.

The neighborhood recovery process is very, very slow. Catholic Charities are making a big, big impact. I thank God for the Catholic Charities because whatever the red tape is, they seem to be able to get around it and get things done. At my age, I'm still able to do some things, like hang Sheetrock or paint something, but an older person who is vested in this neighborhood for eighty or ninety years, they can't get their homes back together. So if I had to prioritize things, I would prioritize the old people first, and I think Catholic Charities has made that part of the recovery possible.

I think that the media is reporting the things that people want to hear and see and not the actual truth. I think that the interest in recovery in New Orleans to the media is the

Superdome, the Jazz Fest, the Essence Music Festival, and you know, the conventions, and the people are somewhere down the ladder. It's not a priority. And I understand that you need all of these things, because New Orleans is a tourist city. We understand that you need all of this to make the city a better place, a working place. But you also need care. You have to care about the people. You can't keep putting us on the back burner.

Right now my people are gonna be so stressed out till everybody's gonna be on medication. We have families that live seven to a trailer. We have families that are living in abandoned houses. We have insurance companies saying that our houses are abandoned, so they are canceling our insurance. I live in this house, how is it abandoned? It may not be what it used to be, but it's my home.

For myself, I was really depressed—I was in Houston and had lost my business. I was in a little shop. It wasn't a big business, we never made a lot of money, but it was my sense of independence. I was in this shop fifteen years; my daughter and I worked there. We called it the Reggae Shop. We sold Bob Marley T-shirts, Frederick Douglass, different African clothing, incense, oil, stuff like that. I didn't lose the business to the hurricane. I lost my business because my landlord decided he wanted to sell the building. So I was depressed about that because I had asked him on several occasions, when I could have afforded it, to buy the building. He said, "Dee, if I ever want to sell it, I'll give you first option." That didn't happen.

So I was in Texas, my husband was here because he works at the Domino Sugar refinery, and they called him back early. I was crying all day, and I went to the doctor, and they said, "Okay, take this medicine." The medication made me sleep ten, twelve, fifteen hours a day, and when I woke up I still cried. A little voice in my head said, "Get up, you're not dead! All of your family is still alive. You can't go out like this. You can't give up like this." And that's when I needed to reconnect with my family. My husband was here, my daughter went back with my grandkids. My husband said, "Dee, if you come back, you're not going to be able to deal with this. Just stay there until I find a place for us to stay."

Houston was a blessing to us. They opened their arms and welcomed us. But if I had to stay there, I think I would have really lost my mind, because my life is invested in this Lower Ninth Ward. Everything I've learned and scuffled for I've put into buying me and my family a house that I didn't think I deserved to give up on. And I don't think we deserve for the powers in charge to give up on us. And that's exactly what it feels like. It feels like they think we don't deserve help. If I could figure in my mind what we have done to be treated the way we've been treated, maybe I'd be content in my heart with the way that things are going.

Deborah Robertson (Holy Cross Neighborhood, Lower Ninth Ward)

The recovery process is slow. A lot of people had some flood insurance, but very, very little. We really didn't have floods. The last time we had a major flood was in '65 with Betsy. But in this particular area it's homeowners, and they did have

some insurance, like us, we had flood insurance. I think we must have gotten only $7000 from homeowner's insurance because we didn't have the wind damage; the bulk of the damage came from the water, so they don't want to pay you off. Opposed to the other side of the Lower Ninth Ward, on the Claiborne side, all the houses were washed away.

If I was in charge, I would of course get the people their money. They changed the rules for the Road Home, oh God, at least five or six times. At first, it was you'll get the money, and now it's if you haven't paid off your home, the money will go directly to your mortgage company. I mean, we haven't paid off the home but we used all of the flood insurance money just to get the house up and running, but we still need more money because there's still more things we have to get done. If the money is going to the mortgage companies, what stipulations are the companies going to put on us? If they would just give the people their money, a lot of people would be back.

ACORN has been helping people gut their houses for free, and they making sure the renters don't get stiffed with all these high costs of rent. Really, right about now, a two bedroom in the city that went maybe for $425 a month has gone up to like $1200. It's not fair, it's really not fair. That's what's gonna keep a lot of people out. They're gonna keep a lot of people out. ACORN also comes to your house to make sure there's no lead in the house, because a lot of these old houses have lead paint on them. They're just trying to stick up for people's rights and stuff, because a lot of people don't know they have rights. That's all there is to it.

The people on the other side of the Lower Ninth Ward, a lot of those houses aren't just owned by one person. It's a lot of relatives that own it, so right about

now they're in limbo because they don't know what they're gonna do. They're going to have open succession [the legal process for transferring inheritance under the Louisiana Civil Code], and a lot of those people don't have the money to open succession. So what's gonna happen to their properties? That's the next thing. The city's gonna take it? Who's gonna take it? Then they're really not gonna be able to come back.

It feels good to be back, but we got our first light bill already. Before Katrina, we were paying just one bill. After Katrina, we're getting the light bill and a gas bill. The gas bill was $285, and the light bill was $33.99. And I'm like, "This is what I've got to look forward to?" I had all of the energy efficient windows put in, I have a tankless hot water heater, and the Green Project is coming at the end of the month to put in all new energy efficient lightbulbs throughout the house. Right about now, that's another reason that's gonna keep a lot of people from coming back to the city. The poor people are not going to be able to come back. We've never had two bills, now we do. It's like, "Oh my God, we've got to get ready."

Business is very slow. In St. Bernard Parish they're doing wonders, their businesses are opening up one after another. When you go on the other side of the bridge in the Upper Ninth Ward, they're coming back really fast. Over here, it's gonna take a while.

Detria Slaughter (Lower Ninth Ward)

I came back because there's nothing like New Orleans. This is where I'd been all my life. I'd never left home before the hurricane, so I wanted to come home. But

it's depressing, it really is. People still got furniture in their houses. See all the people gutting? It stinks when you pass a house and the window is open. It really does, it stinks. And you get flashbacks. It's the stench—like I could be walking anywhere, and I can smell that stench anywhere.

Get the people some money so they can come home. You can't build if you don't have money. People got to have money to come home. It's just bad. Two people around there, two people here, two in that block, two in that block. It's nobody here. It's not enough people down here, and it's not really safe. That next corner was an empty lot with nothing but grass. If you walk down here late at night anyone can jump out at you. The houses aren't sealed off. And all of them should be gutted by now, but they're not.

[How long will it take the neighborhood to recover?]

Five years. It'll never be the same. It'll never be the same. A lot of people are gone, people died, there are bodies out in the river. We would have expected a lot of people to come home, but they're not here, so where are they?

The rents are triple the amount of money they used to be. They say they're putting money back into their house. Some people are. What you got to realize is this is the Lower Ninth Ward. This is not like on the other side of the bridge. Some people didn't have to do a lot of work, and everyone is raising rent. You're working to pay lights and water and rent, and you still can't save nothing. Some people did better going up. But the ones that really do want to come home, they're gonna come home if they get the money. If they give the landlords money, why can't they give the renters money?

We heard the boom. That means they broke the levee on us, on purpose. For what reason? Look at where the levee broke at, at the same hour in three different spots. What's the eyes on that? The city planners did that, about where was the low-income people at. And this really was low-income people, people just barely making it. And most of this is rentals, especially in the back of town. They don't have no houses back there. But that should look like a trailer park by now. They should have given them water and lights and put a trailer on every house that got torn down—and let them come back home.

Edward Waterhouse, Jr. (Lower Ninth Ward, currently living in St. Claude)

Well, I came back in October, right before Halloween. I was staying in Picayune, Mississippi. The work I do right now, I work for a commercial roofing company. They asked us to come back—we were still working, but the city still wasn't open. I moved back in this house Easter of last year, and I've been home ever since.

[Are you planning to move back to the same address?]

Yes, I own that property. Whatever they do, rebuild, I'm not selling. I wanna go back, that's home for me.

The mayor doesn't want you to put no trailers in the Ninth Ward, and if they do, they're taking so long. On that side of the canal, there was a lot of elderly

people, a lot of older people. People that really owned their homes and everything. Everything is gone now.

The community is strong. There's a lot of people that's displaced. They're not living over in the area that I was living in, 'cause they have nothing to come to. And then the rent rate is so high; it's ridiculous, because the people want $1400 or $1500 a month for rent, and a house note ain't that much.

Everybody in the city didn't get the kind of damage we got on the lower part of the Ninth Ward, on the other side of the Industrial Canal. I think the government and the mayor and our governor didn't treat us real fair at all. We lost everything. I felt like we should have been the first people to receive aid, because we have nothing. Especially in between Claiborne and Florida Avenue. It's all gone. And my family, we did own a lot of property over there, we still do. We got eleven empty lots over there right now. Only three of 'em were empty before Katrina. All of them had businesses and residential houses on them. It's all gone. I've got five sisters; I'm the only son. My mother died five months before Katrina. My daddy died six months before Katrina. So I really lost everything I ever had in the world, besides my immediate family that I have now. I lost my parents and everything that they left us. And I don't think the government, neither the mayor, is really packin' fair. Maybe they didn't lose what we lost. Nothin' will ever be the same for me no more, because we lost everything I was raised up with.

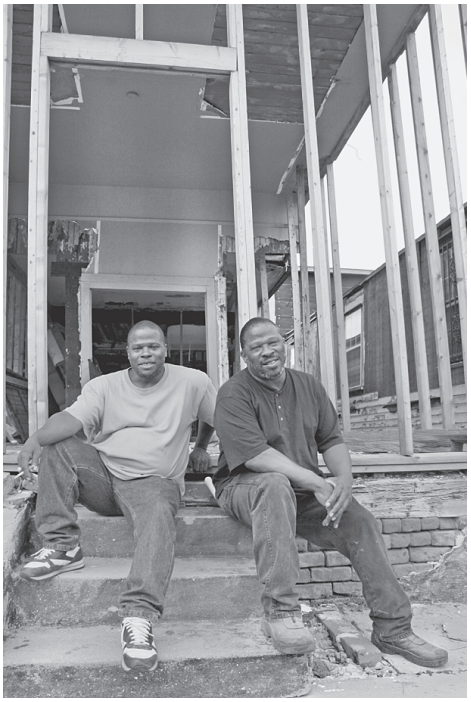
They really say the Ninth Ward is the terriblest place in the city. And I don't believe it. I've been here all my life.

Well, this [brick in my hand] is the only thing I have left of the home that I was raised up in. That's right in front of where the Industrial Canal breached the levee at—that's one solid brick of the whole house, a two-story house. That's all I have left of it.

Nathan and David Perkins (Lower Ninth Ward)

Nathan: *Yeah, this is our family home here. We came here from Florida. My brother and I did a good job by keeping it up. That's the owner* [gestures to his brother]. *We love him, we really do love him; he do right by us.*

David: *The house is about to fall down. We've got the city trying to get the house down for us, so once they get it down, we don't know the outcome. We're still trying to get it down and all the stuff cleaned out and trying to go about*



rebuilding. Right now it's a money problem. We don't have money to rebuild with, but we're trying to get there.

Once we get the money we're gonna get it torn down and start back rebuilding. We're gonna put up something like a five-unit. Some we're gonna rent it out; some the family's gonna get back, so we can try to get some income and make money and survive through this Katrina. It's been eighteen months now and nobody ain't got no money. I ain't got none.

Nathan: *I would love for him to raise it ten feet in the air like they're doing on some of the homes in New Orleans now. If he raises it ten feet in the air and they look at this and our neighbor Fats Domino, they'll be saying, Wow, man. Look at them houses. They came back. They really built them.*

David: *I don't feel so good about [the neighborhood recovery process], but everybody's progressing slowly but surely. They got stuff going on. But like I said, it's been eighteen months and it looks like we could be way advanced beyond where we are now.*

Nathan: *I just hope we don't have to go back and pick oranges, bro. We'd really be up shit creek.* [Says to David] *Are you ashamed to let them know that we were picking cotton and oranges and tomatoes and strawberries? You don't remember?*

David: *Yeah, but you're talking about Tampa, Florida, dog.*

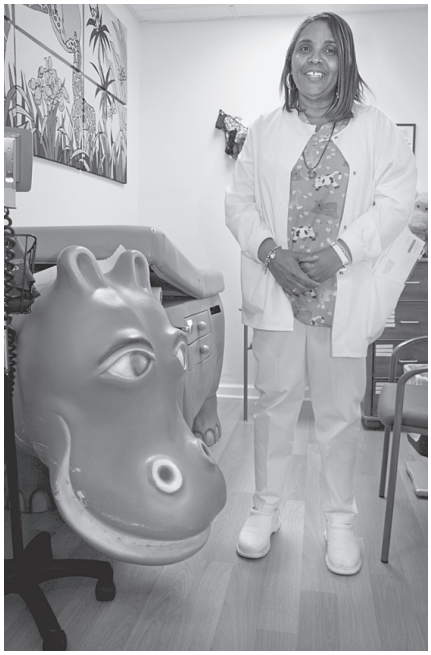
Nathan: *We're talking about life, boy. Katrina came, and I'm really disturbed behind Katrina. There's no help here. The politicians, the mayor, nobody's helping. We are actually hollering for help. But not to man, to God.*

[The government needs to] pay us. Pay us everything that's due to us. We're asking for no less, no more. Treat us like you treat our neighbors in Mississippi. They gave them a $150,000 grant for their homes, straight up. But when you get to us, where so much of our population is black, you mistreat us, you test us, you question us. "Give me paperwork. Give me deeds."

The whole city is dead, not just the Ninth Ward. The only things that are open are the restaurants to make money, all the hotels, the Superdome. What about the houses? We're the backbone of this city, not the French Quarter. Not the hotels. The taxpaying people are the backbone of the city of New Orleans.

Patricia Berryhill (Lower Ninth Ward)

I've been in the nursing profession for about forty-one years. I retired from a large public institution called the Medical Center of New Orleans, formerly Charity



Hospital, after thirty-two years. I was the RN [registered nurse] manager during and prior to Katrina on a high-risk ob-gyn unit, at University Hospital.

Michelle Sheehan was the project director for Common Ground in the Lower Ninth Ward area. She asked my long-time friend Alice Craft-Carney to be the executive director of the Lower Ninth Ward Health Clinic in January of 2006. Michelle contacted me and said, "Look, Alice recommended you to run the clinic. Would you be willing?"

Well, I had retired, but you never retire from nursing—I know you don't. So I agreed to do that and we met. I went on vacation because I had been working at University Hospital for eight days during Katrina—I had three deliveries—and I needed a break. I was really stressed to the max. So when I came back we talked, and I accepted. She looked at my house and said, "Well, how about your house [as a location for the clinic]?" I got back to her the next day and told her yes. Volunteers came from all over the country and renovated this house in about three and a half months. Strictly donations and volunteers, because we had no help from the city. It was just through volunteer efforts.

I'm leasing my house for nothing. As long as I'm here the clinic will be here. One of the things that Alice and I decided is that we won't turn anybody away on the inability to pay. We just don't do that. We're getting people not only from the Lower Ninth Ward but from Chalmette and the Uptown area. We're busting at the seams, and we want to expand. We're looking at the large former apartment complex across the street. We want to keep on helping the forgotten population. We want to bring this in to even greater levels.

[The recovery process is] extremely slow, we're very "flustrated." A lot of the people had homes that were passed from generation to generation. A lot of them were renters, and the homeowners didn't have flood insurance. So they are dependent now on the Road Home [Program] monies, which—I don't know—it's a very slow process. Unlike myself, I had complete flood insurance. My house was covered with homeowner's and flood insurance. But a lot of people weren't in those shoes. They're still waiting.

I don't see a lot of local or national support for this area at all. It looks like to me that this is a forgotten area. And it has so much history! I've seen a lot more people coming back, which I don't think they thought would happen. You ever heard "There's no place like home?" There's no place like New Orleans—the food, the culture, just the people. You know, you pass people on the street and they say, "How you doin'?" on a beautiful day. I've been to Tylertown, Mississippi, I've been to Baker, Louisiana, just relocating, but there's no place like here.

Yes, they had crime, but they have crime throughout. What disheartens me so much is the image they project of this area, like it's nothing but a lot of crime and a lot of thugs. But that's not true; we had a lot of hardworking people in this area, a lot of elderly people, and a lot of caring people.

We need to bring these people home. Give them the monies that they need to rebuild. It's your productive citizens that make a city. Your city is not just made of people who are high on the totem pole of income. It's a diverse city, it has a lot of heritage, and it's made up of the people. Give them the money they need to come home. I'm not saying that I shouldn't do anything to help myself, but at least give us a hand to help rebuild. These people would certainly do what they need to do.

Rose Boitmann (St. Claude Neighborhood, Upper Ninth Ward)

I've lived a lifetime in the Ninth Ward. This is the Upper Ninth as opposed to the Lower Ninth on the other side of the Industrial Canal. I was born and raised in

that house next door. The entire square had belonged to my grandmother at one time. It was a truck garden. She raised her children on crops that she raised and brought to the French Market every morning at three o'clock. Then they started to marry, and she divided up her ground and gave each one a lot to put a house on. So my roots are as deep in here as you can get, almost—it took Katrina to really get me out of here.

Maybe that's why I wasn't too inclined to evacuate prior to Katrina. We had withstood Betsy back in 1965, and we had floodwaters then but only up to the floorboards of the house, so I assumed it would never get any worse than that—boy, did I goof!

We evacuated to the house in the back, which was my grandmother's at one time. It has an upstairs apartment and the man who owns it was kind enough to come over and say, "Rose, the water may come up very high. I think you and Janice should at least go up in that apartment, there's no one living in there right now," which we did. We finally went over late in the evening on the twenty-eighth, right just prior to the storm coming in. And it's a good thing we did because when water came up we'd have never . . .

At night you would hear the looters going by in their boats. They would call to each other in the dark and they would signal to each other with flashlights. You'd hear some shooting, when they had arguments over who was in what section or whatever. Luckily, we had a couple of men across the street, across from my granddaughter's home on Bartholomew Street, who hadn't gone. I would call to them, and they said, "Miz Rose, don't worry about a thing, we stay up most of the night watching." But you know, it was hell. It could have been a lot worse, 'cause there were people who were on roofs. I think the fact that we were sitting there praying for them helped us to survive, you know.

I have several good friends that I don't even know if they survived, I don't even know where they are, you know. I think they're probably with children in other states, but I don't have the address, so there's no way to find out if they're living, dead, or whatever.

Katrina took a great toll not only through the people that drowned but because of the terrible depression and nervousness and everything it created [so] that the older people have been dying as a result—not directly, but indirectly.

I had no insurance. Through the goodness of Catholic Charities, the Mennonites, so many different religious organizations, we're all making a start but we don't know just how far that's gonna carry us, and meantime all we can do is just pray. You spend a lot of time praying, at least we do.

Being born and raised in New Orleans, I know the history of the city fairly well, and I know that people have compared us to a banana republic, and in some cases that may still prevail. I don't know if it's that people have their hands in the pot or if the state just wants to sit on the funds until the last possible moment they can sit on it, mainly because we're talking about a great deal of money. And I know the interest from that, it's like honey, and it may be drawing flies. If this situation is being prolonged, it's either because someone is getting their hands onto money

they shouldn't or someone has ideas about changing the entire structure of the city to a new type city. As they say, we're gonna have a lot of green space and all of that stuff, you know.

Prior to Katrina, I had a tremendous pecan tree in my backyard that fell on my house, caused a great deal of damage. But when you sat under that tree prior to Katrina in the summertime you felt like you were in a park. So to me, if you're talking about the way land is laid out in the city, people have backyards. And if they keep their lawns cut, you know, you have a little bit of heaven, anyways. You don't need all these parks that they're talking about. My park is gone now, so you don't have to replace it with other parks, just give me money so I can sit under my tree. I'll plant another little tree and watch that sucker grow.

Everyone we have come in contact with has brought us hope. The thing that has come out of Katrina has shown me personally that people are good at heart, especially the young people. I'm an old lady, so when you read the newspapers and watch the television news and get that young people have done this and you see how the media projects young people, that they are a wild, nutty bunch, you begin to think, What's wrong with these young people? Then along comes Katrina, and I said there isn't a damn thing wrong with our young people; they're good people. They're turning out by the thousands to help us. And that should be made known to everybody, let everybody know how good our young people are. They work very hard and lay down their sweat and tears for us. And it has made me believe again in just how good we all could be if we just walk hand in hand instead of trying to pull everything apart as some people do.

We still have a lot to be thankful for. Praise God for all the good people we've met. I can't emphasize how isolated we were prior to Katrina, mainly because of Janice's disability. I didn't get around much, but since Katrina we have literally met hundreds of people. It's been a good experience really—it was my own personal call—the Lord was saying, "Wake up, Rose, these people are around you, you need to love people, get over your cynicism, and everybody's good." It was my own little epiphany, as they say on TV, my own little coming-out party.