

JUDY WALKER

InsideOut cover story: FLOOD, SWEAT AND TEARS

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By Judy Walker

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FLOOD, SWEAT AND TEARS: An INSIDE OUT cover story for Aug. 25, 2007, the 2nd Katrina anniversary, written by Judy Walker. It explores what we learned in rebuilding our homes.

Signposts on our road to recovery

By James O'Byrne, Mary Lou Atkinson, Judy Walker, Ann Maloney, Stephanie Stokes, Stephanie Stroud, Ren

Everything mold is new again

Since Aug. 29, 2005, we have told the stories of dozens of our readers as they struggle to rebuild their lives. We have turned to our staff members for reflections on their own recoveries. Our stories are no different from many you have read out completely. One of us was devastated by a tornado, just as flood reconstruction was nearing completion. You will find much familiar in our stories of perseverance, resilience and an abiding love of home.

Seeking higher ground

Features editor James O'Byrne and his wife, Cathy, got 8 feet of water in their Lakeview home. They sold the area Uptown.

I remember the exact moment when I understood how important it was for my sons to have a place to call home

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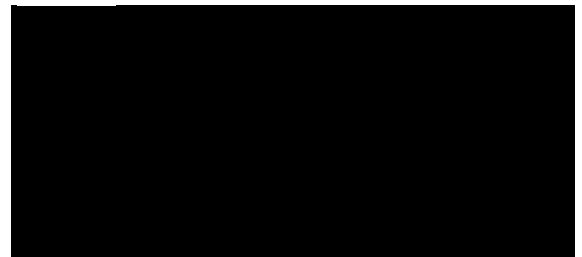
It happened on the afternoon of Aug. 21, 2006, 357 days after Hurricane Katrina struck, the walls fell down a community -- was washed away.

My wife, Cathy, and I had moved into our modest single-story bungalow on Louisville Street in Lakeview 14 y Brendan. For him and his older brother, Colin, it was the only house they had ever known, and over the years home.

On that day last August, while our kids were in school, Cathy and I watched while one of those now-familiar novelty claw machines in old New Orleans restaurants -- reduced our home to rubble.

Later that day, Cathy picked up the kids while I waited. They had both told us -- in that teenage boy way, like see what was left.

When Colin, 16, and Brendan, 14, stepped out of the car and beheld the pile, neither said a word. But their eye they could never put into words, was all of the pain and the loss and the sorrow of Hurricane Katrina. For par

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Within weeks, we started looking for a new house.

Now, I say we watched "our home" get torn down, but the truth is that, months earlier, we had sold the lot to a cruel calculus that determined whether they had to stay or go, rebuild or regroup. For us, the wheel of mist

For nearly a year, we had lived in the suburbs in a rented house. We knew we were luckier by a long shot than evening had all the hallmarks of a forced march.

Just before last Christmas, we moved into our new house , a 1925 Craftsman cottage in the University neigh close to the financial line, while we wait to see if this year's property tax bill or this year's Citizen's insurance

Leaving Lakeview was difficult. We still have courageous and resilient friends who are rebuilding there. They But the truth is that the flood took the neighborhood we fell in love with, and the day of our sons' departure



We're still getting to know this younger, funkier neighborhood. And we are slowly falling in love with our new

Maybe it's the effort required to recover from the shock of losing everything. Maybe we need the house to m made enough memories yet.

But we're working on it.

Last weekend, Colin turned 18. He and a big group of friends spent most of the evening in the basement gan games and pingpong and making way too much noise.

At one point, his friends insisted on coming upstairs and, in plain view of his parents (the horror!), they sang

It was a simple moment, full of joy and laughter. Colin was suitably embarrassed. His parents were suitably t

It felt like home.

-- JAMES O'BYRNE

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The home stretch

Living section assistant editor Mary Lou Atkinson and her husband, Rick, have lived in their raised cottage ir windowsills.

If we aren't back in our house by the end of the month, blame the nutria.



That would be the nutria in the Louisiana Swamp exhibit at Audubon Zoo that bit the hand that feeds it -- sp curator who was weighing the rodent -- in mid-July. At the time, we were making steady weekend progress o shelves in all the closets, paint on the kitchen cabinets, bookcases in the hall and rugs on the newly refinish

"It's not as bad as it looks, " my husband said, holding up a hand encased in a bandage the size of Cleveland

Indeed, the injury slowed him down a bit, but it didn't stop him. He's just as eager as I am to be back in our h upstairs of a neighbor's house across the street -- fill to the windowsills with floodwater in the days after Kat

Why it has taken so long for our triumphant return to Broadmoor is a story for another day. If I ever write a b the Plumber to Call Back, " "The Day the Electrician Short-Circuited" and "I Don't Want to Be Inspired by Na

The point of this story is to share lessons I learned while having my home put back together. I learned a lot, ; rest, and it's this: The very worst brings out the very best in most people. I could not have survived any of th friends, relatives, friends and relatives of friends and relatives, co-workers, fellow journalists and zookeepers person for it, that in another situation, I would not hesitate to be the one who reaches out a helping hand.

In the meantime, if you're interested in renting a really nice half-double on Annunciation Street, I know one t

-- MARY LOU ATKINSON

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Design advice speeds recovery

Food editor Judy Walker and her husband, TV columnist Dave Walker, moved from Phoenix (annual rainfall, 7 Fontainebleau area. Their street had 4 feet of water after Katrina.

When it was time to make the hundreds of design decisions about refurbishing our new downstairs, experiencing trusting their judgment, made our process infinitely smoother.

One of the first things we did was to seek professional help. After the contractor, we hired a decorator for ad O'Brien walked through our empty downstairs, she made excellent suggestions that would have never dawn

What we spent to get her expertise was offset by the times she talked me out of bad decisions. Although we her advice on colors, fabrics, finishes, places to shop and specialists to hire was invaluable.

I also took advantage of another resource: the remodeling experiences of foodie friends. My best friend and countertops. Taking her advice, I didn't have to agonize over granite, stainless steel, concrete, Corian or Form cabinets. And the faucet for the kitchen sink is the exact one that a food editor friend in Palm Beach, Fla., ch

Nothing, however, is more exciting than shopping for light fixtures. When we remodeled another kitchen mo originally from a candy shop, at an antique store near my parents' house in Oklahoma. They were one of my

Guess what? The store owner in Oklahoma still had some. They look great above my new Silestone-topped i future, as well as the trials that we have survived and turned into something beautiful -- by trusting ourselve

-- JUDY WALKER

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The kindness of friends and strangers

Arts and Entertainment editor Ann Maloney and her husband, Night Metro editor Colley Charpentier, moved in March 2005. Due to the levee breaks, about 5 feet of water filled their ground-floor den, with about 3 feet in the kitchen. After the major repairs were completed, they moved back in.

My grandfather used to sing a little ditty made famous by Jimmy Durante that went something like this: Did you ever feel like you were feeling that you wanted to stay?

When we paddled a pirogue to our house on Vendome Place on Sept. 10, 2005, I definitely had the feeling that I was home.

In the two years that followed, that song became my silent mantra as we gutted and rebuilt the lower two floors. The despair and reclaim our place ran up against an unbelievable longing to hop in my red Honda and high-tail it out of town.



The battling emotions could wash over me within the same half-hour as we met with adjusters, accountants and insurance adjusters.

My husband, Colley Charpentier, hails from Cut Off, and he and his family have that Cajun can-do spirit. For him, working shoulder-to-shoulder with his brother and father as a beautiful thing.

To me accepting such help was a sign of failure because it meant I couldn't get through this with just my brain.

But we had no choice: The two of us, along with almost a dozen of my flooded-out relatives, moved in with my parents for make-shift accommodations, combining the upstairs of our house and a FEMA trailer in the driveway for me. My parents, with empathy to tales of setbacks, dropped off casseroles and oohed and aahed at progress.

As the Sheetrock was floated and I picked out the colors, decided on the tiles, switches, railings and doors, I felt a sense of control.

The anger and self-pity that too often visited gave way to gratitude. I was grateful for practical things such as a new Orleans look I'd always wanted.

More importantly, I was grateful that I could grow wiser and realize that there is no joy in going it alone. The ,
them steady you -- just as you hold fast to them when they need it.

And, as I have so often in the past two years, I find my life is a microcosm of my city's overall experience. We
volunteered more than 14 million hours in our city since the storm. That number is so very low because it do
houses throughout the area.

We have a long way to go, but I cannot fathom where we'd all be without kind strangers and loving family and

One old friend told me as she looked at the carefully cut Sheetrock and smooth walls going up in my home:

That's too true -- in my home and in my city.

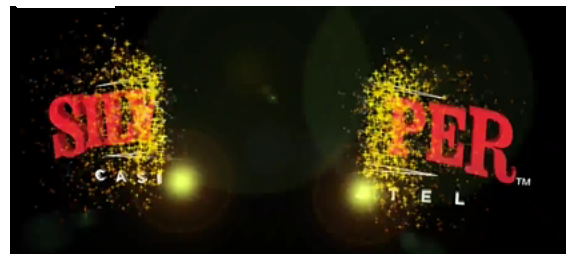
-- ANN MALONEY

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Better the second time around

Assistant InsideOut editor Stephanie Stokes and her husband, Managing Editor/News Dan Shea, have lived
house was spared in the May 1995 flood, but was caught in the waters from the Orleans levee breaches after
driveway, after Christmas 2005.

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It was tempting to just tear down the soggy, moldy mess of our house and start over. Instead, we decided to re-neighborhood.

Our 1940s-era cottage with a deep front porch had already gone through at least two renovations, which added to the "family house" -- a kind way of saying "roomy but nothing fancy."

Sixteen inches of water meant we were on our way to renovation No. 3, a complete gutting and redo of the 2,000 sq ft beyond our modest insurance settlement. We hired architect/designer Volume Zero, the patient and creative re-envision our patched-together floor plan. And we were blessed with equally skilled and responsive contractors.

A mishmash of smaller rooms has given way to spaces designed around how we live. The grander kitchen, finished with another, instead of rooms apart. The office, which had been in a too-sunny, too-hot room in the rear too close to the noisy, kid-centered rest of the house.

A new partition wall creates, on one side, a center hall that lends formality to the entrance and, on the other, a screen TV. The great room itself was carved out of the old kitchen, a too-small breakfast room and a little-used living area on the first floor. And, resolving one of my pet peeves, the laundry room is now no longer anywhere near the TV.

We reclaimed our downstairs Aug. 19, 2006. We're not the first people to describe their post-Katrina renovation, but it won't be the last.

-- STEPHANIE STOKES

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Flooded or not, we're all survivors

InsideOut transfers editor Stephanie Stroud lived in a duplex that didn't flood, quite. But, as with all of us, there were survivors.

I was one of the lucky ones, unless "survivor guilt" somehow makes me unfortunate. Let's count the ways:

I lived in a rented duplex on a block of Iberville Street where every other house took on water, but it only lapped at the porch.

I had foolishly let my renter's insurance lapse just months before the August 2005 storm, but it didn't matter. And when my front door somehow was left unlocked and ajar for who knows how long, no burglars touched the living room floor. And everything else -- all in clear view through the front door, where the curtain had been torn -- was inside -- was left untouched.

I had recently reduced the insurance on my car because it was nearly 10 years old, but I was ready to buy a new one and I packed my lucky belongings into the bed of her pickup truck, a man working at the house across the driveway that was still damp from the 3 to 4 feet of water that had engulfed it. I don't know if he ever got the car out.

After six weeks with my parents -- all the while getting a paycheck -- my employer had my workplace back in Louisiana and living in my old apartment was not an option. Besides, the roof leaked and the kitchen floor had buckled, from the water that had flooded the house.

A friend let me live with him for a year, rent-free (I helped pay the utilities). He made space for my furniture and I didn't complain.

As a displaced Katrina victim, I also qualified for 401(k) tax breaks to buy a new car and my own place, where I live now (or it will be in about 30 years), and it's on the second story, high above the 6 inches of water that flooded the first floor.

Because I've been so lucky, I've felt an obligation to help those who weren't. In Lakeview, Gentilly and eastern New Orleans, we gutted others to the studs, put in insulation, you name it.

It has helped me face my survivor guilt and made me realize that I, too, live with this storm day after day. It has helped me stay here -- and made me more determined than ever to stay here and help make sure we recover.

I was, and still am, one of the lucky ones.

-- STEPHANIE STROUD

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Been there, done that

InsideOut editor Renee Peck and her husband Stewart, a lawyer, have lived in their two-story contemporary Street Canal flooded the home for the first time in its 50-year history. They moved in upstairs on April 23, 20

At The Times-Picayune, I'm known as the mold writer.

Really. I had a guy from Washington call once and ask for me by that title. And I come by it honestly: Not only K rebuilding, but I had plenty of the stuff myself. Many of you know that, if you've followed the ups and down weekly in this section.

The short story: We got 8 inches of water, which might as well have been 8 feet, since we had to strip the int involved running (expensive) commercial dehumidifiers 24/7. Then we added spray-foam insulation, mold-r paint picked by Stewart, and a new kitchen.

Along the way a tornado hit our house, peeling off two walls and three of our four white square columns. I or

We have learned, like so many of you, that abnormal is the new normal. Drywall costs twice as much, carpen service are iffy at best. We've lived upstairs with no water or furniture downstairs, had a squatter secretly liv our mail.

We've been back in our house more than a year, are 95 percent finished with our renovation, and figure the l:

We've learned to count progress in our neighborhood in small but measurable ways. The corner stop sign re poured his new foundation last week.

We never thought that, two years later, we'd still be fighting insurance companies and waiting on plumbers a because I've interviewed dozens of you, living in FEMA trailers and renovated Arts and Crafts cottages and s keep me inspired.

Stay tuned.

-- RENEE PECK

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Can't go home again

Staff writer Chris Bynum had completed a renovation of her Lakeview house a year before the storm. It was apartment with her three dogs.

Just about every morning right before 6, you will find me perched on my pillows with a cup of dark-roast coff summer. Two rooms away, the sun-filtering transom over the back door serves as my alarm clock.

Time, you see, even when it's not measured by two ticking hands or a digital read-out, designates pattern. A feels like home. This is what I came to realize after Katrina.

When I first moved into this apartment in October 2005 after losing my home in Lakeview, this residence be with someone else's possessions, about having a roommate who never seemed to come home. I was living v

But as time went by, the previous resident decided to live elsewhere, mourning her loss of New Orleans each new home in another state. As she moved things out, I gradually moved things in.

But I was cautious and conservative. As I wrote in that July 8, 2006, article, I wanted "a simpler, less-cluttered home. I missed my back door that opened to the garden I had slowly built over five years' time. I missed driving up the driveway to the electric gate I had saved for. I missed my space and wasn't sure I wanted to live in an apartment again where

But as time went by, and I heard the woes of others who are trying to rebuild their lives, I realized I was not sure I ever want to face this battle of homeowners versus flood insurance again? Would I ever feel insured, even re-insured? Would I want to be among those standing in line in the August sun for eight hours to protest my property-tax assessment? Would the money from my flood insurance be used to cover my mortgage? Just thinking about locking the door to a new home questions the sanity of home ownership.

Yet I was restless, not yet at home where I was. And then those patterns started to reveal themselves. Every time she made something with real cream and amazing cheese for her family, she made some for me. Every morning just after sunrise, I hear my neighbor working in her art studio. She and I are the early risers on the block.

Every evening when I'd come in from a walk, the man on the porch down the street would ask me about my car. My pickup truck pulled up next to me. The man asked me for directions, then asked me to repeat them, and the porch light flicked on instantly, and she stepped outside.

"Chris! Been waiting for you. Have something to show you," she said. I started up the steps, and he drove off.

"I think that man was taking a little too long asking for directions," she said.

Talk about a sense of home. This is the same woman who helped me put together a bed that came in a box, with my dogs (I think). She is friend, neighbor, landlady.

So I will stay in my three-room, one-bath apartment where things are beginning to feel familiar, in a place w/ shown themselves. Things have become so familiar that when I pull my car into a parking space on my stree dogs at the window who recognize the sound of my tires coming to rest on the gravel.

-- CHRIS BYNUM

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