



The poems and photographs presented here are excerpts from *When the Water Came: Evacuees of Hurricane Katrina*, Interview-poems by Cynthia Hogue, Photographs by Rebecca Ross, UNO Press, 2010. This collection of images and words grew out of an extended collaboration among writer, photographer, and each of the thirteen Hurricane Katrina evacuees they interviewed and photographed. Together, these pictures and words convey the personal experiences of a handful of Katrina evacuees, as individuals representative of the many people affected by this tragedy.

Richard Lyons
Vietnam Veteran (*excerpt*)

My sister left the day before the hurricane.
Me being hardheaded ... I didn't leave.
I went to the French Quarter with friends
for a hurricane party
and got trapped.

 Couldn't nobody get in,
 couldn't nobody get out.

At first, it was fun.
We barbecued and partied,
four blocks from the heart of the Quarter.
We didn't have no water,
no electricity. No gas, no
 nothing. The moon wasn't out.

 By 6 o'clock it was pitch dark.

Hold your hand up,
you couldn't see it.
We all ate together. We
lived together. We
found us a store. We

 broke in there, got us
 meat, charcoal. We
sat together and prayed. I was happy.
You know the 12-step program?
We say a prayer, then drink [laughs].
It dawns on me sometimes, we
have to believe with our minds.

 Yeah, He give us strength. We
 utilize the strength real good.



Ardiss “Ardie” Cooper Casino Bartender (*excerpt*)

Monday morning, Colleen’s father
woke me about 8:30. Our backyard flooded
right up to the patio. Then the carpets started
buckling from below. I opened
the bedroom door and yelled,

“You girls better get your
asses up because the water is
coming into this house.”

I grabbed insurance papers,
my coin purse for tips—I was a bartender
at the casino—a little medicine, put them
in a Mudd Bag I tossed in the attic.
We had our three cats, a Pekingese
we were taking care of,
Colleen’s goldfish and we all
went to the attic and
looked down. The water rose to the top
of the bottom window
in the living room, so we went
downstairs and my ex broke the window
and we each hopped on the sill
and jumped. By 9:20,
we’re hanging on the gutters
off the roof. My ex pulls himself up,
then each of us. We did all this
in 5 minutes because the water
had reached the roof.

We clung close to four hours
listening to pine cones
and needles from the pine trees zing by,
watching our cars playing
bumper cars in the cove.
All of a sudden the cars
were underwater – whoosh –
gone. By 2 p.m. the storm
turned and pushed
the water back to the Gulf.

Here is a datebook that starts
the day Katrina hit. This is my story.
Can you believe somebody has a datebook
starting the first day of the rest of her life?



Catherine Loomis
Professor (*excerpt*)

Storms follow a pattern once they start,
but Katrina moved west, not north.
Friday, I was at Sally's house watching CNN,
and we said, *That storm moved.*
On the way home, I bought all the water left
at Save-a-Center, and when I saw the display
of batteries at the front, I thought,
I ought to get a pack. That small decision
saved my life. Sunday the sky turned
an awful orange. The whole house shook.
Monday there were 4' of water
along Gentilly Ridge, which is high ground.
Live Oak leaves shredded,
stuck all over like green confetti.

At first, the water was clear.
I had fish in the yard.
Then the water turned the tea color
that swamp water gets
from tannins in bark. Raw sewage
floated up, and benzene.
The first living thing I saw
was a Lakeview parrot—a sign
of great good luck. Saturday,
I heard three shots on my street.
There was a pause. Then three more,
closer, then a pause, then three more, closer.
*Were they killing people
with a sawed-off shotgun?*

I lived in Bywater. We heard guns all the time.
I know things I shouldn't know.
At that moment, I knew:
This is what it feels like to wait to die.
I took my flashlight, stood at a window,
and SOSed with it. To this day
I can't believe that a coast guard patrol
saw that light and Dave Foreman
from Apex, North Carolina in his big,
goofy helmet jumped out of a helicopter,
landed on the balcony and said:
"Everything's going to be ok now."
And then we flew through the air
like an apotheosis.



Victoria Green
Mother of Four (*excerpt*)

We the people of New Orleans
always talked of The Big One,
but I had not heard of Katrina.
Hurricanes come and go.
But when Lake Pontchartrain broke,
every one of us was screaming
and hollering. If the lake was flooding
the city, we knew it'd never be the same.
These times you remember every kid
you went to first grade with
by *name*. You wonder where
everybody was, the bum
on the corner, the pickpocketers,
the little man that's always on Bourbon Street
painting the city. CNN was showing people on houses.
This was not a strange neighborhood to me.
This was *my* neighborhood.
It's where I went to school. Where
I shopped for groceries at Circle Food.
I got married at that church,
christened my children, buried my kin.
New Orleans is the cornerstone
for spirituality, the stomping grounds
for psychic ability. You don't
get on the bus and go somewhere else.
It's our culture. You'd have to be a citizen
of New Orleans to understand.
I was here a week and my mother passed.
She never had been sick.
I think any of us would trade
any charity we got to go back
to August 15, 2005 and warn all our family
that terrible storm would take everything away
from us. But we don't
get those chances.
We get what we get.



List of photographs reproduced (in order of appearance):

From the two boxes of objects Emily gathered after Hurricane Katrina, Emily's studio floor, Phoenix, Arizona, November 2008 (detail)

Richard, in front of his third apartment after Hurricane Katrina, Phoenix, Arizona, April 2009

The Claiborne Avenue Bridge, seen from the Lower Ninth Ward, New Orleans, Louisiana, December 2009

Ardie, in the living room of her new apartment, where she moved after Hurricane Katrina, Scottsdale, Arizona, April 2009

The only jewelry Ardie was able to save from Hurricane Katrina, Scottsdale, Arizona, April 2009

The box of pictures and letters that Ardie took with her after Hurricane Katrina struck, Scottsdale, Arizona, April 2009

The staircase to Catherine's apartment, New Orleans, Louisiana, November 2008

Sidewalk near Catherine's home, New Orleans, Louisiana, November 2008

Catherine, in the reading room of her upstairs duplex, New Orleans, Louisiana, November 2008

Untitled, New Orleans, Louisiana, November 2008

The neighborhood market near where Victoria's family lived for three generations (#1), New Orleans, Louisiana, November 2008

Victoria, in her living room (her fourth move after Hurricane Katrina), Minneapolis, Minnesota, November 2009

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