

IN KATRINA'S WAKE

LIFE IS STILL FAR FROM NORMAL FOR THREE NEW ORLEANS ALUMNI | By Johanna Maranto

Although nearly six months have passed since Hurricane Katrina ravaged the city of New Orleans, the precise scope of the disaster remains difficult to grasp, especially for those outside the region. A good place to start, says Dr. Joseph Shrum '72, is with numbers—specifically, the city's population, which has dropped from approximately 460,000 to well under 200,000. That's a loss of more than half of New Orleans' residents.

"It's not the city I knew and loved," says Shrum, a professor and vice chair of the department of dermatology at the Tulane University School of Medicine. "There's a frustration in everyday living, in doing simple things like going to the gas station or the bank." Not to mention the mailbox. "In the first four months following the hurricane," he adds, "I received only 10 pieces of mail."

Yet Shrum counts himself among the more fortunate of New Orleans' residents. His 100-year-old home, located uptown, was untouched by the storm. "The only thing I had to replace when I returned after evacuating for one month was my refrigerator," he marvels. Shortly before Katrina struck, Shrum did what he calls a "vertical evacuation," checking into a room on the 25th-floor of a downtown hotel with his dog and a friend. "By Monday morning," he says, "the electricity was out and there was no water. Fortunately, we had filled the bathtub. During the height of the storm the hotel felt like a cruise ship, because the water was actually sloshing out of the tub onto the floor."

Nor did the storm's end offer any relief. "It was horribly hot," Shrum recalls, "and businesses were being looted every-

where we went." Those conditions alone were enough to convince Shrum and his friend to leave New Orleans and drive to Texas to stay with family. "Because there was no news," he adds, "we didn't even know that 80 percent of the city was flooded." From Texas, Shrum went next to Meridian, MS, where he worked for a month at one of Tulane's satellite medical clinics before returning to his home.

Tulane University is New Orleans' biggest employer, but post-Katrina, there aren't many people left in the city to employ. The university reopened in January, but "the whole enterprise has been compacted," says Shrum. "A total of 230 faculty positions have been eliminated, 180 of them at the medical school. The medical school and residency programs depend on having patients, and there aren't many people left



Musician and Louisiana native Burke Ingraffia '88 counts himself lucky to have lost neither family nor possessions during Katrina. What he did lose, like most of New Orleans' 460,000 residents, was life as he knew it in a city he loved.

living in the city to use our services."

Professor John Kramer '54, dean emeritus of Tulane Law School, faces similar problems. "The people you depend upon for the school to function—the people who do such things as type, clean and place orders—are not here, and they won't be," he says. "They

still have jobs, but they don't have any housing." What remains to be seen, he adds, are how many of Tulane's law students will choose to return. "Law schools throughout the country agreed to take our students for the fall. We are not laying off any law professors, but I don't know how many of the students are going to come back. They don't know what the conditions will be." Another serious question: "Who will apply for next year? Would I apply if I didn't know these things?"

As of early January, conditions remain uncertain: Many streets were still filled with debris, and half the city was still without telephone service, two-thirds without electricity. "It's not as if we were hit by the hurricane yesterday," Kramer points out. "There are still no stores open here, so

we have to drive to parishes outside of the city to shop. The restaurants that have reopened can't get servers, and are offering diminished menus. The doctors, architects and lawyers are not here. They don't have any business. Admiralty and maritime law was big in New Orleans, but the shipping industry is dead."

Like Shrum, Kramer suffered only a few minor material losses from the storm. He spent the month after the hurricane in nomadic fashion, staying with family in Georgia, Virginia and Mississippi before returning to his home. His youngest sons, however, who were practicing law in New Orleans, have had to relocate. "I have a real sense of Diaspora," Kramer says of the changes forced upon him, his family and his fellow citizens. While he believes New Orleans will eventually be rebuilt, what he calls "the heart of this city, its music, art, theater and restaurants," will be harder to mend because of the lower pay associated with those businesses and the lack of affordable housing. "I think it will be a year or two before the next houses get built. There's no place to put them."

One of the musicians displaced by Katrina was singer-songwriter Burke Ingraffia '88, a Louisiana native who had released a jazz CD, *Independence, Louisiana*, earlier in 2005. "I am fortunate that I didn't lose family or any of my possessions," says Ingraffia, who, as the hurricane neared Florida, decided to drive his mother and disabled father from New Orleans to Austin, TX, to stay with his sister, Celeste '87. "I didn't lose stuff, but I did lose my momentum." Ingraffia has a background in business as well as music, but in post-Katrina New Orleans there is little work in either field, so he has

decided to stay on in Austin—even though this means leaving behind his parents (who've since returned to New Orleans), his girlfriend and his network of musician friends. While the people of Austin have been very welcoming, jazz is not a big part of the city's well-known music scene, he says, so he's put his musical career on hold and is focusing on business instead.

When Ingraffia talks about having to change his whole life "at the snap of a finger," he could be speaking for most of New Orleans 460,000 residents, wherever they may now find themselves. "You hear about tears from everyone," he says. "The emotional side is so intense. It's just very, very sad."

Hurricane Relief at Exeter

Hurricane Katrina struck the Gulf Coast on August 29, less than two weeks before the first day of classes at Exeter. But as Acting Principal Tom Hassan wrote in a letter to the Academy community, "Such an unprecedented natural disaster calls for a response from us, not only as individuals but also as a school."

Exeter quickly joined with schools and colleges around the country and enrolled several students displaced by the storm, who were greeted with a standing ovation at assembly on September 18. In October, a dozen Exeter students, under the leadership of the Exeter Social Services Organization (ESSO), organized a silent art auction during Parents Weekend. The auction, which featured paintings, sculptures, photographs and ceramic pieces created by students and alumni/ae, raised \$2,000 to benefit hurricane victims. "The auction took a lot of behind-the-scenes work," says Johanna Lawrence '07. "It was a success thanks to the many students who gave their time to volunteer."

The Academy's response will continue this summer. The Exeter Summer School has created five full scholarships specifically for students from the Gulf Coast, scholarships that include not only room and board, but also transportation, books and other fees. Summer School Director Doug Rogers, who has been in regular contact with the Biloxi, MS, superintendent of schools, says he's been greatly impressed by "the heroic effort that's been made to get the school system back up and running, and to secure a quality education for the students of Biloxi. If Exeter can play even a small role in this effort, that would be wonderful."

—J.M.

Exeter alumna Benedetta Macri '98 writes about the two weeks she spent in Mississippi as a Red Cross mental health relief worker. See 'Finis Origine Pendet,' page 100.