

## Family

(Continued from Page 1)

There was no way to leave the hotel."

Days passed. "We left Friday."

"After the first couple of days, we were pretty much on our own. We were seeing helicopters and [army vehicles] going by, but they didn't stop to get us. We weren't their first priority; they were going to save people in hospitals and people still stuck on their roofs," King recalled, exhibiting amazing understanding for her age level — and in her plight.

They were rescued when her cousin came back into the city to get them in a boat. With a sense of flat resolve, perhaps even surrender, about the days she and her family were stuck in the situation, King said, "If he wouldn't have come, we would probably still be there." And this she said several days after they were rescued.

But before that happened, the social conditions at the hotel deteriorated over the last days there. Workers and their families remained throughout. But some people were sent out of the building and others left "because it was just way too crowded," King said. "People started stealing food. It was just getting out of control."

Now safely back at home, but her campus still uninhabitable, King said she will "work and go to community college."

Will King stay in Las Vegas? She is clear that she likes Xavier. "Xavier is a really good school, so I look forward to going back there," with a slightly lowered voice and implied uncertainty, "as soon as possible."

Her major? "Psychology



Hurricane Katrina also displaced La'tai King, who was a freshman at Xavier University in downtown New Orleans. King is now living at home with her mother, Dion Smith.

and Pre Med."

The experience is one that will undoubtedly help in her profession. King said "It probably will. Being helpless and nobody being able to help you..." she said insightfully.

"I've always wanted to help people. Period."

### A Woman Waiting and Wondering

Dion Smith of Las Vegas Nevada is from New Orleans but was too young to remember Camille or any other hurricane. And she was worried about her daughter La'tai King. She was concerned about her father Fleming Smith Jr. and his father Fleming Smith Sr. who were about to brave a ferocious

storm, Katrina, and next, a deluge.

When she lost contact with her daughter, La'tai King attending Xavier University in the now-disaster area, "I was devastated..."

"I was about to go nuts," she said.

It began when she was unable to get a flight out for her daughter, "It was a family decision to go to the hotel," Dion Smith said. Plus, she said there are a lot of disabled people in the family, including the 93-year-old, who has little or no eyesight.

"They didn't think it was going to be that bad." She explained that she didn't know it was rated a category four or five hurricane.

Because she knew that her family had "some supplies," she said. "My grandfather always keeps a lot of water and a lot of extra canned goods, and stuff like that, so I was thinking they had it together."

She thought they would be okay. She was in touch with them in the initially until two days into the flood.

"We didn't communicate for two days because La'tai's phone went out."

In her efforts to find out about her family, Smith called local TV Channel 8 and anyone else she could think of to help her. Her call to New York to CNN to relay information she had that there were 30 students left in the Xavier building got action.

"I called Jesse Jackson and he helped."

They got those kids out,

but her daughter was still awaiting rescue at the hotel where she and her grandfather and great-grandfather and cousins were huddled.

"I was losing it. I was thinking they were out on a bridge or they were in the Superdome someplace..." Then she heard about the rapes. Horrified, she stayed by her phone and didn't even go to work."

But now, her family is at her home, safe. But the trauma of the ordeal and concern for the others left behind are still too much for Smith, "Even thinking about it, I cry," she said.

### Faith is how he made it through

Dion's father, Fleming Smith Jr., is celebrating his 71st birthday soon and is displaced from his New Orleans home. Fortunately, perhaps, his home was spared major damage and is not covered by high flood waters. Yet, the reality is setting in that he might not be able to return for now, and the future is uncertain.

"It [Katrina] was the worst," he said.

"We've been threatened by high water before, but this time they couldn't get the pumps running," Fleming Smith Jr. said.

"I never thought I'd have to leave home." And he certainly never envisioned being this many hundreds of miles from his home with no choice. Fleming Smith Jr.

had survived Katrina, but then faced a possibility of never having the home he'd come to know.

Just prior to the hurricane, he thought, "Maybe we'd be on the outskirts of town until after the wind would die down... And after the storm we could go back home," he recalled what his mindset was at that time.

Then after the flood, he still believed he'd be able to stay near home until it was time to return to his house.

"I was blessed." Fleming Smith Jr.'s house was spared from the high water. "Our house was still standing," recalling his reaction. "All the houses were still up. You couldn't hardly see damage." Fleming Smith Jr. said there were a lot of downed trees in the street near his home of 15 years.

During the trouble, he said they had a television for watching the news but later switched to radio news when his portable TV's batteries

what they [government and city] do in the three month's time," he said "They're not letting anyone back in until they get the city straight."

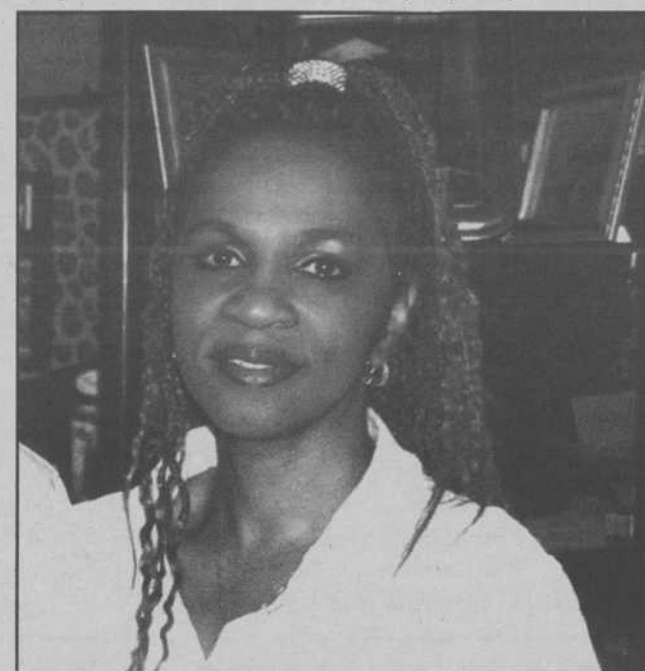
Fleming Smith Jr. agrees that the pollution and toxic chemicals in the water will pose a real problem in the clean-up effort.

He said his faith is what sustained him in the storm and felt that his family needed him to be strong.

"God strengthened me to help them."

### The Sage Survivor

It is just as compelling to listen to the wisdom and seasoned insights of Fleming Smith Sr., the charismatic elder male member of the family, than it is to have him describe his ordeal. Although his home in New Orleans might not have survived destruction, at 93 years of age, he seems destined to survive nearly anything.



The disaster has forced Dion Smith's family into her home.

ran out.

In the hotel, Fleming Smith Jr. said the guests he encountered at the hotel there were people of different races. He said that people's behaviors have remained pretty much as before.

He was not happy with the "response time of officials."

He only wants the government to help the residents "get back on their feet."

Explaining one major reason why he thought people stayed — including him:

"You don't know whether it's true or not." Fleming Smith Jr. believes that many didn't leave because they had received warnings before, but things had never been this bad in any storm before.

As for whether he will return, the ready answer is yes. But not right away.

"I'd like to wait and see

Fleming Smith Jr. said, "I was brought up under the greatest teacher — Mr. Hard Times.

"He taught me how to be responsible and accountable... instead of sitting on my butt, and waiting for someone..."

"He taught me how to have respect for authority."

Even Katrina could not deter Fleming Smith Sr. from his mission to share knowledge and give commentary on his city, his experiences, and his beliefs about life. Being articulate, clear-minded and ready to give his take on the social conditions of New Orleans, the city he left under water.

Saying that his sense of safety in the city had deteriorated before the flood. He said that "fear" was preva-

(See Family, Page 3)



Sentinel-Voice photo by Kathi Overstreet

Fleming Smith Jr., Dion's Smith father, is also living in Las Vegas in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina's devastation.