

# Katrina

(Continued from Page 1)  
ever see them again.

"That family down there, all three of them were in wheelchairs. I think they got out when my sons left," said Everage, pointing out the houses as she spoke.

"That guy over there, he works offshore. He was gone, too. Those two people in that house over there, they're middle and high school teachers.

"The lady here, an administrator at Charity Hospital—everybody knew each other. People went to high school together, they knew your family."

Having no other idea of her neighbors' fates, Everage read the hieroglyphic markings on the houses, left there by rescue workers to document the dates of their visits and the fates of the inhabitants. A "0" meant no bodies were found, and as Everage surveyed the houses, she breathed a sigh of relief at all the zeros she saw.

Then she came to a house where a single woman lived with her five small children. She looked at the abandoned car mired in the bog of the front yard, then hesitantly raised her eyes to the markings on the wall. The "6" confirmed what she already knew in her heart.

"They didn't make it," she whispered with a shake of her head. "I taught her son how to ride his bike."

Everage also worried about her relatives and friends who lived on the other side of North Claiborne Avenue between Florida and Caffin Avenues, a place where, at the time, soldiers were barring people from entering and where, it was rumored, bodies were still being found.

"I know people on the other side and they are people I grew up with and

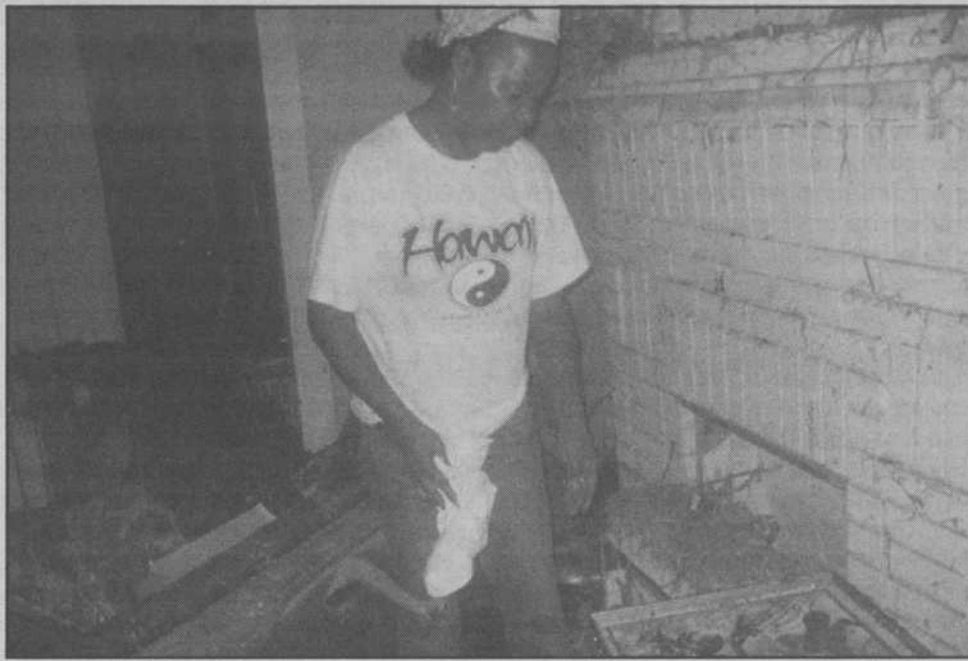


Photo special to Sentinel-Voice by Zenitha Prince  
**Pamela Everage begins the process of recovering valuable belongings inside her home which was under water for weeks. Everage is among thousands returning to New Orleans.**

they're not letting you over there," Everage said. "I know a lot of the old people didn't leave. And I'm afraid that a lot of people — my relatives and other people—didn't make it."

Everage, 39, was working on a cruise ship in Hawaii when Hurricanes Katrina and Rita hit New Orleans and like many others she observed the devastation of her home on television.

"Everything was crushed and saturated weeks ago and then the second storm hit and I'm watching [television] and saying, 'That's my neighborhood,'" she said. And then they said the lower Ninth Ward got hit the worst. And I'm thinking, 'The levee that broke is right where I live.'"

Everage lived in a largely African-American community best known for producing cultural icons like Antonine "Fats" Domino Jr., the legendary rock-and-roll star and Kalamu ya Salaam, a dramatist, fiction writer and prolific poet.

Like a small city within a city, the Lower Ninth Ward is bounded by the Southern

Railway railroad and Florida Avenue Canal to the north, the St. Bernard Parish line to the east, St. Claude Avenue to the south and the Industrial Canal to the west, which effectively isolates the enclave from the rest of New Orleans.

Wrested from the wilds of a cypress swamp by poor African-Americans and immigrant laborers from Ireland, Italy and Germany, the Ward was among the last of the city's neighborhoods to be developed.

And while in recent times, quaint early 20th Century homes were mingled with shrines of modern life such as barber and beauty shops, small businesses, gasoline stations, 'washetarias', eateries, a surfeit of churches and the ubiquitous corner store, more than 36 percent of its residents live under the poverty line.

Many attribute the ward's slow economic growth to the flood that ran longtime commercial and industrial businesses and residents out of the neighborhood when Hurricane Betsy devastated the city in 1965.

Now, again, many wonder

about the future of the neighborhood that bore the worst of Hurricanes Hurricane and Rita with most of its 5,601 housing units destroyed and its nearly 14,000 residents scattered, homeless or dead.

Everage felt relief that at least her children were not counted among the latter.

"I spoke to my son two days before the storm and I told him, I got a feeling this storm will really hit so go ahead and take a backpack, go ahead and get out," Everage recalled.

For days, her son traveled from town to town trying to evade the reach of the storm until he was finally able to board a Greyhound bus to Virginia, where his sister attended college. As she took in the utter ruin of the neighborhood, Everage was glad she had decided not to bring him back.

In her home, the situation was equally grim. Foot-high black sludge, waterlogged, capsized furniture and the

# Audits: Millions in Katrina aid waste

WASHINGTON (AP) - In its rush to provide Katrina disaster aid, the Federal Emergency Management Agency wasted millions of taxpayer dollars by giving cash to ineligible recipients and overpaying for hotel rooms, government investigators said Monday.

Two reports released by the Government Accountability Office and the Homeland Security Department's office of inspector general detail a series of accounting flaws, fraud or mismanagement in their initial review of how \$85 billion in federal aid is being spent.

The audits found that up to 900,000 of the 2.5 million applicants who received aid under FEMA's emergency cash assistance program — which included the \$2,000 debit cards given to evacuees — were based on duplicate or invalid Social Security numbers, or false addresses and names.

Thousands of additional dollars appear to have been squandered on hotel rooms for evacuees that were paid at retail rather than the contractor's lower estimated cost. They included \$438 rooms in New York City and beachfront condominiums in Panama City, Fla., at \$375 a night, according to the audits.

"FEMA has a substantial challenge in balancing the need to get the money out quickly to those who are actually in need and sustaining public confidence in disaster programs by taking all possible steps to minimize fraud and abuse," the GAO audit by Gregory Kutz states.

FEMA spokeswoman Nicol Andrews said Monday the audits were still preliminary. The agency is working closely with auditors to make sure money is wisely spent and is committed to helping disaster victims, she said.

putrid scent of mold hampered her efforts to salvage mementos of her family's life. And in the end, there was not a lot to save.

"I had a lot of nice paintings on the wall, all my paintings are gone," as well as a computer and other hard-earned items, she said.

Her children's diplomas, some of their trophies, her grandfather's gramophone and her daughter's rusted trumpet were all that was left of years of living. "I don't think I know what to feel," Everage said. "I haven't processed [the loss] yet."

But as Everage continued to think about her loss and the loss of her neighbors, many of whom did not have renters insurance, she knew she could not come back, and she became angry.

"We can't come back. The problem's been the levee for 25 years since 1964. Same stuff happened: a lot of people lost their houses and their lives. It's like déjà vu," Everage said, then added, "There's got to be charges against somebody — federal government, state — somebody has got to be held accountable."



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