



St. Bernard Parish, East of New Orleans June, 2006, by Shannon Adams

IN the early morning sun, the brick house looked dilapidated. Weeds that had overgrown the yard lent an general air of dirtiness and untidiness. What had once been home to a family was now a drowned mess. My collection of adults and teenagers, volunteers from the east and west coasts, were standing and gazing, wondering how this could have happened.

Now, it had been ten months since storm surge from the oncoming hurricane Katrina had breached the levees north of the Parish and inundated this blue-collar community under twenty feet of water.

It was hot and muggy already at 0800. We had been warned to drink plenty of water and to stay in the shade when not in the house, and to take frequent breaks. We were required to wear hard hats, N95 respirator masks, goggles, work gloves and steel-shanked work boots. We don't know what we'll be stepping into. Hand sanitizer and antibacterial wipes are ubiquitous.

Surprisingly, the house we worked on only smelled musty when our crew leader broke open the door and opened windows for

cross ventilation. As we entered cautiously, wide eyed at the complete mess inside, I wondered what kind of wild creatures we'd encounter. Behind the house was a drainage canal. My biology degree kicked in yet again and I scanned for any signs of wildlife. No birds, sadly. Lots of weeds. The absence of life around me was disturbing. Vegetation was covered with a light film of dust. It was especially surreal and apocalyptic looking. Nature was trying to re-establish itself, but at this point it looked like a losing battle. I wondered what was in the soil and in the air. Was it really safe to be here? What had I gotten myself into?

We worked in spurts, cleaning out closets, moving furniture, bedding, clothes out to the street. Everything had to be removed. Dry wall and cabinets had to be pried off the studs. The refrigerator door was duct taped closed to prevent the incredibly foul odor of the long-rotted contents from spilling out.

We try and salvage what little is intact for the owner to pick through, a small pile reverently set aside. It's so sad. I wonder about the owner and her family. We were told that



Interior of Granny's House

she was moving to Florida to live with one of her daughters and was not going to rebuild. Her husband had died a few years ago, and she did not want to live in the house alone. As the clean up process was getting close to completion, our owner pulled up in a blue minivan. She was a sweet little granny, spry and bright. She had come by to see her house once more before leaving forever. We could tell it was quite a shock to her to see all her things piled on the lawn. She went through the objects we had salvaged and we packed them up in some clean plastic bags she had in the car. When she decided to take a look inside her house, we tricked her out in hard hat, mask and goggles. Clad appropriately, she gingerly stepped inside. Her house was not as she remembered.

Old memories and the new reality clashed. Tears began to make their way down her cheeks and she turned away. We stood in silence, respectful of her grief. We helped her out the door, removed her protective gear and she hugged us, thanking us more than we deserved. After she climbed into her van and

drove away, we looked at each other and cried, too.

Replay this scene a thousand times over and you'll get an inkling of what happened to New Orleans.

I've been back twice since, in October '06 and February '07. While it looks a bit neater and cleaner, and the electricity seems a bit more reliable, it is still a long, long way from any semblance of normal. Mother Nature reminded the City That Care Forgot who is really in charge and the chance this remarkable old city takes by staying and rebuilding. It's a crapshoot and the chances of coming up snake eyes again, I don't want to take that bet. As a new hurricane season approaches I'm already nervous for the friends I've made down there. We caught a huge break in 2006. What 2007 holds is anyone's guess.



Shannon Elizabeth Adams is one of my extraordinarily talented prize students who graduated in 1979 with a degree in Biology from Transylvania University. Hailing from Louisville, she also holds an AD Nursing degree from Bellarmine College, and a BS in Nursing from Emory University. She is a Certified Orthopedic Nurse, currently

residing and working in Charlottesville, Virginia. She has multiple broad avocational interests including birding (with a growing life list), college football and basketball, NFL football, drawing, painting, and visiting art museums wherever she can, reading non-fiction, quilting and sewing, walking the Eight Fold Path.

She reports "I'm working on a quilt that will be donated to the Krewe of Muses (an all-woman Krewe in New Orleans) to be auctioned for charity. They accept out-of-state members, so I will probably join in the near future. We got a lot done on a couple of houses in the upper Ninth Ward. I met a lot of really terrific people and witnessed the fabulous Mardi Gras Indians--black men and women who construct elaborate beaded costumes and walk from their neighborhoods to a central meeting place under the I-10 Highway to have mock battles, then party all day. It was quite amazing."



Shannon Adams was a member of what I like to call a rare *Golden Class*, a group of students who stood out from most classes in their scholarship, varied interests, and a great joy in being alive. They made my job as professor easy. This group included Linda Donaldson of AAPA notoriety, Given Harper, now Chairman of the Biology Department at Illinois State

University in Bloomington, IL, and Jeff Hinton, now an Obstetrician and Gynecologist in Johnson City, TN All accompanied me on a biology field trip to Florida in 1978, when we visited Lee Hawes, Fred Liddle, and members of the Suncoast Amateur Press group while camping out and exploring the rapidly declining populations of Florida flora and fauna. I have been on many field trips, but this one was the best I ever had. We formed a rare bond on this two week trip that persists today. We still stay in contact with one another through e-mail and visits.

THIS 21st century journal is the work of J. Hill Hamon, who lives near Frankfort, in the heart of Bluegrass Kentucky. He salutes the rare concerned few who are generous with their personal time and money, who work to help the Bush administration neglected/ignored American hurricane victims on the Gulf Coast – Shannon Adams, and Maurine and Jack Scott – all of whom are exceptionally beautiful people.

Amateur Journalism is not noted for its timeliness. Most of the publications in the bundles could have as easily been created a century ago. E-Journals have been changing that in their immediacy. Bill Venrick deserves much credit for helping hold the members together as an association. His frequent *Alerts* provide important up-to-the minute news of members – their health, activities, deaths, and significant information in ways that could not done through the monthly bundles. I particularly enjoy the immediacy and special freshness of Jim Lamanna's sprightly frequent *Post Haste Notes* e-journals. + + +