

To: My City

All my life I lived in New Orleans. Now my memories are all washed away, floating with the dead bodies that couldn't ride out Katrina. Then came Hurricane Rita saying, "Kick them while they're down."

From August 28 on, while sitting at my little desk in Sabine Hall at Northwestern State University in Natchitoches, Louisiana, where I'm a freshman my eyes were glued to the news every minute I could get to a TV. I sat there moving my lips over and over, until they started to make a song.

"It always went past us; it always went past us." Storms always formed in the Gulf, but they never hit us directly.

But my broken record of a song couldn't repair my house or the other hundreds that went under all over my world.

I've been sheltered all my life, and spoiled, never had to ask for anything. I could call on my aunt, grandmother, or mom, and they'd be anywhere I needed them at the drop of a hat. But now what was I to do? They were miles away, having been forced to evacuate. As far as I knew they were just riding in the car looking for hotels. They trying to fight off something that they shouldn't have to. There was a point when I didn't know whether they were okay or not. I spent lots of time calling my mother's cell, only to receive her voicemail over and over again. I was distracted with worry, because I didn't know for sure where they had evacuated to and I couldn't reach their cells hardly at all.

As I watched the news, my eyes became a waterfall, and the waterfall wouldn't stop. It just got full until it made several individual puddles on my small desk. I saw that New Orleans residents had nothing, nothing but their lives.

I watched my city being exploited on NBC, CNN, etc. They kept showing New Orleans residents over and over crying out for help only to end up empty. You saw children crying for food and the little ones hovering under their mothers' breasts and the older children struggling hard to stay in their mothers arms, but they keep slipping. These people are hungry, thirsty, and tired but steady being viewed by millions of people. We got so much attention that they had to do something, right? They showed our tears and fears of being left in misery, to die over and over again. And for three days they still failed to do anything.

We were exploited, and by that I mean hung on a clothes hanger to be looked at, taken out to be worn over and over without being washed.

How could a heart be so cold? How could a soul be so black? How can someone see people in a need for help and just do nothing? I stared so hard at the television like I could change what I saw. As though I was the president and with my hard staring eyes I could change everything.

By the third day of seeing my fellow New Orleanians stranded in the dome, I turned off the television, rubbed my hands together, and started to write this. One thing was going through my head, and it was the thought of this piece reaching thousands of people. Everyone's saying that all the things we have lost are material. They can be replaced. We should be thankful for our lives.

We should, and I am, but it's still going to be so hard after so much we have worked for. I thought about my little sister, my grandmother, and especially my mother and her sister. They had just bought a house, after years of dreaming and planning and saving. I couldn't reach them by phone, but I knew from the news that their new home

below the Industrial Canal was destroyed.

New Orleans helped make this girl whose words you see before you. This summer, when we moved from the 9th ward in New Orleans to Chalmette, in St. Bernard Parish just four weeks before the hurricane, I thought I'd never look back. I was tired of seeing the same old crooked things on my block. I was tired of mess between two girls who hated each other. I was tired of passing the small white house on the corner that all the elders on the block who sat on their porches whispered about, complaining about the drugs that came in and out of the house. More than that, I had made myself determined to support my mother's move. I didn't want to keep thinking the things I'd miss: my neighbor's flowers, meeting up with my friends to walk to school together, the children playing double dutch in the street. I was ready for our move to a different neighborhood just outside the city.

So why am I looking back now? When a friend is in trouble, you do not turn your back on her. In my case, that friend is my city, a city that has given me laughter and tears. New Orleans has given me my education—not just the books and lessons I could study anywhere, but the opportunity to struggle for learning in the most difficult of situations. I've learned to be a flower growing through cement sidewalks.

If I hadn't lived in New Orleans, I wouldn't have developed the same passion for writing. I went to a school, Frederick Douglass, named after one of the great black writers. For all four years of high school, I got to study daily at Douglass High with Kalamu ya Salaam, one of the great writers from New Orleans. I got to sit in a circle as part of my school work and share myself through my writings with other young people who were developing as writers. I even wrote in the voice of women in the history of

New Orleans, like Virginia Banks, whose boyfriend was killed in a shootout with police in 1900 but who helped me by giving me a way to explore the tensions between career and romance between dating and politics.

My city needs me. It needs my prayers, my hope, my words and my strength. My city can recover, and so can the people in it. New Orleans was more than a city; it was my home. So to New Orleans I say, “Hold your head up.”

To: My city
I love you and you shall rise again.

By: Keva Carr
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