



# Voices



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A Place to Collect Our Thoughts

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## Welcome Changes?

BY BRITTANY OLSON

They say be careful what you ask for, because you just might get it. Growing up in New Orleans my biggest complaint was always that nothing ever changed. The people, the places, the skyline . . . Everything was always the same. There was always a great comfort in the familiarity of home, but I left for college looking for something new and fresh. When I returned for law school at Tulane, everything was exactly as I had left it. And part of me always wanted New Orleans to be different. Until all of a sudden, too much had changed. The thing I hated the most about New Orleans, the fact that it never changed, is now what I miss the most. A home that is forever changed and scarred is lonely and sad.

New Orleans is so much more to me than just Mardi Gras and the place where I go to school. It is my fifth grade teacher and the friends I've had since kindergarten and the families we share Thanksgiving with every year. And the saddest part of it all is that so many of those people have lost so much that they don't want to live there any more. It seemed like every day we heard about someone new who was moving or who had lost their job or who was fed up with mold and wet carpet and had headed for higher ground.

Whether I like it or not, I have learned incredible things in the past four months. I learned that cell phones, email, and iPods make life bearable no matter where I am. I learned the importance of having friends who will swoop in when I am sad and make sure I have enough margaritas to make me laugh again.

I learned that sometimes all I need is a good meal with familiar faces, even when those faces are lined with exhaustion and emotion. I learned that you should never take a smile for granted. Seeing so many people without smiles is overwhelming to the point that even one happy face will make you cry. I learned that I am stronger than I thought and more fragile than I thought all at once.

I've learned that when your world turns upside down, sometimes you just have to sit down and wait for the dizziness to stop. Everything is different. Even the things that are the *same* feel somehow more important and changed because they hold so much comfort all of a sudden. And nothing is just ordinary anymore because I can't even remember what ordinary smells like.

I always felt like New Orleans needed a bit of new life breathed into it, I just wasn't expecting quite this strong a blow. And some of the scars will never heal completely. But once we've brushed ourselves off and picked up the pieces, maybe all this change will be exactly what it takes to make this city feel like home again.

*Brittany Olson is a 2L.  
She is spending the semester in Atlanta, Georgia.*

## Waiting It Out

BY LISA GIAMONI

Compared to most, my experience through Katrina could be considered, to say the least, "tolerable." I evacuated to a house in Louisiana that would best be described as a five-star resort. I was wined and dined, watching the destruction unfold from the comfort of my accommodations. However, unhappiness consumed me. I cried a lot, most notably in the Marshall's department store, as I tried replacing things I had lost. I stopped appreciating my luxury refuge, just wanting things back to normal. Ironically, I didn't like New Orleans during my initial arrival, and could never imagine myself coming to miss the city. Nonetheless, as the days wore on, I longed for the dirty streets of the French Quarter.

I went through the motions—I called schools, and when finally accepted, I rushed up north on a 24-hour long car trip. I convinced myself that everything would be fine; visiting at an Ivy League school couldn't be a bad thing, right? I maintained that view until sitting in my first civil procedure class. The professor seemed like a smart enough man, but he was no Professor Friedman. While sitting in the back of the classroom, it was easy to observe that students were more engaged with instant messaging than the class itself. After 20 minutes of keeping myself awake, I had already made up my mind. I could tough it out and probably do just fine, but the thing was, I didn't want to. I didn't want to experience civil procedure without Professor Friedman, and I didn't want to experience my first semester of law school without Tulane. I craved a class where I didn't yawn, and where I was kept on my toes. The professors didn't seem to have the time to talk to me after class. The students were extremely friendly, but I missed the friends I had made at Tulane. I made it through only two classes at the University of Pennsylvania. In the end, it just wasn't where I belonged, or where I thought I could succeed.

Once I made the decision to withdraw, I quickly regained my motivation. I found a legal internship in less than a week, where I will work until my return to New Orleans. My job has been enjoyable, but there have been times when I regret waiting for Tulane to reopen. I have come close to withdrawing, as I felt cheated out of certain things. When the Greece study abroad dates were posted, I felt crushed, realizing I would be in my second semester of classes during the dates. I had been so excited for this program, but Tulane snatched the opportunity away, right from under me. It was a difficult decision, but in the end, I did stand by Tulane, and I will continue to "roll with the punches," like most of my peers. I have come to accept that I survived a natural disaster, and I must make certain adjustments. My first year at law school may be less than ideal, but at least it will still be at Tulane.

*Lisa Giamoni is a 1L.  
She is spending the semester in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.*

## Where do I go from here?

BY AMBER DATTILO

After a three hour excursion with my MBA class on the John James Audubon and several rounds of beer pong, I managed to make my way to the Gold Mine for a bar review, for what would become my last hoorah in the New Orleans I remember. I spent my undergraduate years in New Orleans- going to Frenchman for Halloween, watching fireworks on the river for New Years, catching throws on St. Charles from Bacchus and Le Krewe de État, spending Cinco de Mayo at Bruno's and Vera Cruz, getting a sunburn at Jazz Fest- my memories are endless. This is the New Orleans I know: where you spend a weekend in the fall walking around the French Quarter with a daiquiri or shopping on Magazine Street. I haven't been back to New Orleans since Katrina drowned the city that I have come to call home. What will I go back to?

I weathered Katrina with Justin Esworthy, Matt Gigliotti, Beau Berthelot and company in Franklinton, Louisiana, and after a couple of days I realized things were going down hill, and fast. I didn't know where to go from there. My initial reaction was to go back to the city. As the water poured in, that option quickly sank away from me. I packed up my two fish and the small bag of personal belongings that I thought would hold me over for a couple of days, and headed for California. Now what?

I quickly realized that I had to start classes somewhere else if I wanted to stay on track with my academic schedule. Where was I supposed to go? I landed at Loyola in Los Angeles and I was quickly greeted by a law school that was quick to offer assistance and support. Law school was not on my radar for this semester; I was supposed to be starting my MBA program. I had to ask myself time and again over the past couple of weeks- what direction am I heading in? Katrina has completely turned the plans I had for myself upside down. I know many of you feel the same way.

So as I sit here in Southern California and think about returning to a city that I have grown to love over the last six and a half years, I worry; I worry about how many flat tires I will get from running over debris in the road, whether I will come down with the mysterious Katrina cough, whether my apartment will be the way I left it, whether my neighborhood will be safe, whether life in New Orleans will be anything like I remember it.

I think about the city everyday. I think about my future. I think about what I will do with my time when I return. When I get on the road in January, I will not be worried about where I'm going because I know my destination is New Orleans. Despite the things I will be worried about, I will return. I will return with a purpose. I will spend the next couple of months helping in any way I can to get this city and its people back to some semblance of normalcy. I challenge all of you who are returning to do the same. We can make a positive change in New Orleans. Winston Churchill once said, "We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give." Here's our chance.

*Amber Dattilo is a 3L.*

*She is spending the semester in Los Angeles.*

### Submission Guidelines

All students, faculty, and staff members are invited to submit essays to Voices. Submissions should fall somewhere between 400 and 600 words and speak to the author's personal experiences this semester. All submissions should be sent to [cninsler@wulaw.wustl.edu](mailto:cninsler@wulaw.wustl.edu)

## Almost Normal

BY BROOKE OVERBY

Life in Uptown is "Almost Normal"—enough reflections of prior life almost to convince you that it will all be okay. Mornings begin with coffee and the Times-Picayune, picked off the doorstep. The cats (now seasoned travelers) have resumed their morning naps in the sun. The Roman Candy cart eases down my street with that familiar clatter of the wheels, although the horses have yet to return with their clip clop along the road. Shops and restaurants along Magazine and St. Charles are opening, with limited hours and menus. Winn-Dixie, Sav-A-Center and Langensteins are open, also with limited hours. The Whole Foods they say will be back the 4th of January. The Wal-Mart, who knows?

There is a relief to be gotten in returning. Living with people who have been through it is an unexpected pleasure. Because Uptown below Freret suffered wind damage alone it is recovering quickly, for the most part, unless roofs or windows were seriously compromised, and some were. The early closing hours for stores have led to peculiar changes in the routine. If you are here now, be prepared to wait in line. The short hours are not excessively burdensome, and people are more considerate, more polite and more patient than I have ever seen.

The disaster has in some respects regressed Uptown maybe fifty years, back to the small community it once was. Perhaps due to lack of refrigerators (all on order), restaurants are packed and are the center of the nightlife. One can see and live the Uptown that long-timers mourn—the way it "used to be". "Need to stop by Clement Hardware and then Langensteins!" "Say, let's catch the show at the Prytania!" This is one reward of returning early, seeing this retro thing.

But Almost Normal is only almost normal. Workers' trucks, and an occasional Humvee with soldiers, crowd the major streets. Roofers, adjusters, FEMA, and the levees have replaced talk about Rex, Comus, and Momus (maybe a good thing, in my view). Once above Freret gradually the signs of the flooding from the levee breach start, with houses there being ripped up in degrees but progressing with repair. Move further north or to the East and the more serious damage begins: house after house flooded even to the ceilings, neighborhood after neighborhood. Lakeview is stunning. It is hard to explain, really it must be seen. It as if the area had been gassed and everything living vaporized, with only the formerly tidy and well-kept houses left still standing, but ruined inside.

So, when living along the sliver of land near the river, there is a marked dissonance. You quickly realize that the increasingly vibrant Uptown and Garden District are surrounded by miles and miles of still darkness and devastation. It is a peculiar feeling in the quiet nights. You can either insulate yourself from what happened, or simply dive right into the mess. Can the city as a whole be revived in some new form? It certainly will be a challenge. The mood right now seems neither particularly optimistic nor pessimistic, putting aside the cheerleaders and deserters. There is a tiredness and sadness still in many eyes, even with the real relief of returning. Some spark has gone out, if only for the time I hope. Talking with returnees, the subject often turns to friends who are not returning, to peoples' losses (house, house plus job, job, deaths, clients, now gone heirlooms passed down through the family (the last bring particular tears)), to the anger around it all. Then, there is the uncertainty. Only almost normal, like I said.

*Professor Overby teaches courses in Contract and Commercial Law.  
She is back in New Orleans.*