After Katrina: Tales of the Storm, from Houston and Buffalo

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So there have been a lot of practical challenges on a whole variety of levels. … The commercial litigation that we do has come to a halt. The state courthouse in New Orleans remained shuttered. There is a question about the integrity of the official records.”

The storm has presented challenges on a whole variety of levels.” Evans said. “In the long term, the profession will remain viable, but there are a lot of short-term challenges. The caseload is now full of labor and unemployment work as the Gulf Coast feels the economic heart of the storm. The state of Texas, she said, has granted displaced attorneys provisional admission to the Texas bar through May, and she may seek permanent admission to that bar. And the dislocation may be opening up new opportunities for the firm. “Most of us feel we will continue to have a business presence here in Texas,” Evans said.

She has lived in New Orleans for 23 years, though, so the shock and awe of a city so deeply disrupted is great. “It was a very, very difficult thing for us to see our city on fire and flooded,” she said. “We were safe, but there was nothing we could do to help.”

But you count your blessings. We are all well, and we have received a tremendous amount of support from our friends. I have heard from my colleagues at UB, many of whom I have not heard from in years, and a lot of professional colleagues, too.

“There are a lot of pluses as well as the negatives. We have all just banded together to help one another and make the best we can of the situation in which we find ourselves, which is one of the benefits of having a family. Among those displaced by the storm damage were law students from Loyola University New Orleans and Tulane University, also in New Orleans. Three enrolled in UB Law School as visiting students for the fall semester: Michelle Schwach, an Ambrose native; Peter Bredenbro, from Niagara Falls; and Sara Johnson, a native of Williamsville. One of the UB Law School students is visiting for one year, with the exception of de-...

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Tales of the storm, from Houston and Buffalo

Like a hurricane coursing across open water, sometimes life takes a sudden turn.

For the residents of New Orleans and the Gulf Coast, that reality was dramatically true on the weekend of Aug. 26 to 28. As Hurricane Katrina bore down on the below-sea-level city, and those who could evacuate hit the road, residents knew that their lives would be forever altered by the power of wind and water.

Barbara Ryniker Evans ’76 was one UB Law School alumna who learned that lesson. Evans, a partner in the downtown New Orleans law firm Evans, Schnabel & Associates, fled with her family as the Category 4 hurricane approached. They have established a temporary office in Houston while the city of New Orleans continues to recover from the worst disaster in recorded history.

“The storm has presented challenges on a whole variety of levels,” Evans said. “They also have a law partnership, which is a student at Amherst College in Massachusetts.”

The Evanses’ uptown New Orleans neighborhood, “a beautiful part of the city that has a lot of 18th and 19th century houses and a lot of large oak trees,” was unaffected by severe flooding, but suffered a tremendous amount of wind damage and damage from trees. Our neighborhood is very much as it was, with the exception of debris. Her law partner’s house, however, was flooded.

Throughout the city, she said, houses sport large blue tarpaulins on their roofs, concealing storm damage. It is difficult to find qualified workers to do cleanup and repair work, given the great need and the fact that many New Orleans residents are evacuees.

Professionally, many of her law firm’s usual clients – individuals and business interests in Louisiana – have suffered major damage: “The legal profession is going to change as a result of the significant economic changes that have been wrought by the storm,” Evans said. “In the long term, the profession will remain viable, but there are a lot of short-term challenges. The caseload is now full of labor and unemployment work as the Gulf Coast feels the economic heart of the storm.

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“There are a lot of phases as well as the negatives. ’We have all just banded together to help one another and make the best we can of the situation in which we find ourselves, which is one of the benefits of having a family. Among those displaced by the storm damage were law students from Loyola University New Orleans and Tulane University, also in New Orleans. Three enrolled in UB Law School as visiting students for the fall semester: Michelle Schwach, an Amherst native; Peter Bodnar, from Niagara Falls, and Sarah Johnson, a native of Williamsburg. The three are among as many as 100,000 students at 30 institutions whose educations were disrupted by Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath.

Schwach had completed orientation and a week of classes when she got a call from a family friend in New Orleans on Aug. 26, a day before the National Hurricane Center extended a hurricane watch for Louisiana. “She said, ‘This looks like it is going to be a bad storm, Michelle,’” she explained. “I just had a bad feeling about it. I said, ‘I am just going to leave.’

She took a Saturday afternoon flight back to Buffalo, then followed the storm over the next week from her family’s Amherst home. “Watching everything unfold was brutal for me,” she said. “I just had a bad feeling, and the dislocation may be opening up new opportunities for the firm. Most of us feel we will continue to have a business presence in Texas in the short run.”

The least of her problems was finding a place to stay. “There are a lot of pluses as well as the negatives. The mold grows so fast you would never believe it,” she said. “I just had a bad feeling about it.”

And every day it got worse. “I said, ‘I am just going to leave.’”

On Friday night I was with friends, ” she said. “It was a very, very difficult thing for us to see our city on fire and flooded.”

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