

U.S.

# Harvey Delivers Another Blow to Katrina Survivors

For Katrina evacuees who settled in Houston, going through Harvey has been like reliving a nightmare—one that surfaced a familiar terror, as well as hard-won experience



Terrence and Zeeda Veal, survivors of Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans, clean up Wednesday after evacuating their flooded Houston home after Harvey. PHOTO: DANIEL KRAMER FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

*By Arian Campo-Flores and Erin Ailworth*

Updated Aug. 30, 2017 7:10 pm ET

HOUSTON—As Hurricane Katrina approached New Orleans in 2005, Terrence McKinney fled with his mother and sisters, eventually settling here after the storm demolished his house and washed away all their belongings.

A dozen years later, as Hurricane Harvey barreled toward Houston, he decided to stay put. On Monday, floodwaters rose quickly around his apartment complex east of downtown, then gushed into rooms and burst windows. Mr. McKinney and his wife, daughter and other relatives decided to make their way across the flooded street to a two-story apartment building.

The chest-high water coursed so fiercely they joined hands with neighbors to form a human chain to help each other cross. The swift current swept away one woman, who clutched a tree as people yelled to her, “Hold on! Don’t let go!”

The woman lost her grip and was swept away. “It’s like losing your mind all over again,” Mr. McKinney said. “Watching death happen, losing everything again.”

For many Katrina evacuees who ended up settling permanently in Houston, going through Harvey and its aftermath has been like reliving a nightmare—one that surfaced a familiar terror, as well as hard-won experience.



Flood victims gather for a meal at a shelter in the George R. Brown Convention Center in Houston. PHOTO: BRENDAN SMIALOWSKI/AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE/GETTY IMAGES

Katrina uprooted residents to cities across the U.S., but Houston received the largest share outside Louisiana. Of the 150,000 to 200,000 evacuees who initially arrived in Houston, as many as 40,000 remain, according to estimates by the New Orleans Association of Houston, a networking and support group.

Patricia McGinnis, 72 years old, escaped New Orleans with her family just days before the city’s levees burst in Katrina’s wake. She prepared methodically for Harvey, packing a suitcase and important documents. Outside her home, she stored makeshift sandbags for floodwaters.

“You can’t let this kind of weather catch you sleeping,” Ms. McGinnis said. She lives in a housing development in southwest Houston built for Katrina evacuees in a collaboration between Oprah Winfrey and Habitat for Humanity. Ms. McGinnis also survived Hurricane Betsy in New Orleans, she said, hauled to safety in a canoe past floating bodies during the 1965 disaster.

Across the street, Ms. McGinnis’s daughter, Jamie Cunningham, 39, prepared for Harvey by stowing a pair of propane tanks and a filled gasoline tank on the porch. She propped a metal ladder against a wall in the living room in case rising waters forced her and her two children to the roof. “They’ve already been trained on how to get on the roof, what to do, how to hold on,” she said.

In northwestern Houston, Terrence and Zeeda Veal, who fled together with their six children from Katrina in a crammed Ford Crown Victoria, also decided to ride out Harvey. On Monday afternoon, Mr. Veal, 35, said he watched nervously as floodwaters rose in the street and then submerged the family car in the driveway.

“We’ve got to go,” Mr. Veal said, gathering his wife, two sons and one son’s girlfriend. Mrs. Veal, who can’t swim, felt terrified and helpless. “How am I going to help my children?” she recalled thinking.



The view from Terrence Veal’s front door in Houston. PHOTO: TERRENCE VEAL

with a truck to retrieve him and seek help.

“It was the most horrifying thing I’ve ever seen,” said Mrs. Veal, who returned home Tuesday with her family. “I can’t wait for this just to be over.”

Mr. Veal went outside in waist-deep water to look for help. He found several men with a canoe, and they helped board Mrs. Veal and her son’s girlfriend. The rest of the family waded while the men towed the canoe.

The current fought the canoe, nearly tipping it, Mrs. Veal said, until they reached more shallow water. A volunteer with a truck drove them to the nearby apartment of one of the couple’s daughters. They arrived to find a power outage and little food to share beyond bread, peanut butter and jelly.

As they hunkered down in the darkness, two of the Veals’ sons arrived and said a 7-year-old boy in the complex was suffering an asthma attack in the stairwell. Mrs. Veal said she found the mother holding her boy, who was barely conscious, his mouth turning purple. Someone arrived

After watching the swift floodwaters swallow the woman at his apartment complex Monday, Mr. McKinney, 32, and the others headed to a second-floor unit nearby. The water continued to rise, and a group of about two dozen people who had gathered there broke open a window to reach the roof.

Mr. McKinney's sister-in-law launched pleas for help, trying to reach 911, phoning friends and posting messages on social media. Eventually, she was connected to ABC's "Good Morning America" where she made a nationally televised request: "Please help us, I'm scared."

The group spent hours on the roof without food or water, until rescue boats arrived. Mr. McKinney and his family arrived at the George R. Brown Convention Center, joining thousands of others who found shelter there.

"It's like you're a refugee all over again," Mr. McKinney said Wednesday, as he drove back to his apartment to see what was left.

**Write to** Arian Campo-Flores at [arian.campo-flores@wsj.com](mailto:arian.campo-flores@wsj.com) and Erin Ailworth at [Erin.Ailworth@wsj.com](mailto:Erin.Ailworth@wsj.com)

*Appeared in the August 31, 2017, print edition as 'Katrina Survivors Relive Ordeal.'*

Copyright © 2019 Dow Jones & Company, Inc. All Rights Reserved

This copy is for your personal, non-commercial use only. To order presentation-ready copies for distribution to your colleagues, clients or customers visit <https://www.djreprints.com>.