

Feature:**BC student returns to home in New Orleans area**

by Tom Cowan
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Over thanks giving break I returned home to New Orleans for the first time since Hurricane Katrina. I was finally able to see for my self what had been described to me for nearly three months. While it was comforting to see most of the inner city intact, I was discouraged by the immensity of what seemed to be irreparable damage across the city's residential areas. The constant sight of these ruins gave me a sense of uncertainty that is shared by so many people who still call New Orleans home.

Among the least damaged parts of the city are downtown and the French Quarter; these are the oldest parts of the city

house and neighborhood stayed dry and undamaged.

In my home neighborhood called Old Metairie, the water level was high enough to total two cars in our driveway, but unlike most houses, our first floor was high enough to stay dry. Every house in the city damaged or not, has been marked by spray-painted exes and various symbols signifying the visitation of search and rescue teams. Most of the city has taken on a junkyard like appearance with a loss of its characteristic subtropical plants, people and colors. Like the houses, many trees which remain standing appear lifeless. The dead plant life seems more characteristic of nuclear war than hurricane devastation; it causes me to wonder



driven deep enough into the ground. The New Orleans London Canal and Industrial Canal met similar fates and flooded most of the eastern half of the city such as the upper and lower 9th Ward. These three canal levee breaches caused flooding that consumed 75% of the New Orleans metropolitan area. The city saturated in a cesspool of its own swage and industrial waist for 2-3 weeks.

The lawless chaos and violence that ensued during this time has long vanished and the true extent of it seems to have only been recorded in the accounts of those who were there. One interesting fact I learned was that among the very first people to enter New Orleans after the storm were heavily armed private security forces, such as Israel's Instinctive Shooting International. They were paid to protect wealthy neighborhoods such as uptown's Audubon Place.



While there are no more Israeli mercenaries in New Orleans there is still a considerable police and National Guard presence. They do not seem to have much left to do except patrol. No longer crime ridden, many nighttime streets seem quiet and rural often without street or traffic lights. The city's population has only returned to between 60,000 – 100,000 people, less than a quarter of its pre-Katrina population. Much of the city can literally be described as a ghost town considering the number of people who died there. The Louisiana death toll for Katrina was recently counted at 1076. The city's damage estimate is between 60 and 80 billion.

New Orleans and much of Louisiana has a reputation for lazy and corrupt politics. This used to be almost laughable for many nonpolitical New Orleans locals, but today is a new era with a serious demand for reform. Above all is the call for a hurricane proof levee system. With the next hurricane season quickly approaching, history is in the making as the city rushes to achieve this goal.

photos by Tom Cowan



which are for the most part on higher ground. In the uptown area the damages vary from block to block. Any structure which was weak before the storm seems to have met its end. The downstairs apartment of my mother's uptown house was flooded enough to cause a complete rearrangement of furniture, which needless to say did not need to be put back into place or even replace because the neighborhood is likely to be declared imminent domain. Only about a half mile away my grandmother's

how much of this disaster should be considered natural.

Several of my friends who stayed in the city during the storm said they were relieved at how little damage the storm seemed to have done immediately after it passed. It was not until the next day on Tuesday August 30, that the 17th Street Canal broke open in the Lake View area and spilled its water across the city. The levee engineering flaws are believed to have involved loose soil and sheet piles which was not