

## Difficult school year for Katrina survivors

A 3-by-4-inch picture postcard and a small trophy are all that remain of Montrelle's large collection of dance and academic awards. Hurricane Katrina's floodwaters broke or twisted or scattered everything else.

"In a way I want to go home, but it's not really much to go back to right now," says Montrelle, a pleasant, well-spoken 14-year-old who had just started classes at her dream school when the hurricane struck. An excellent student, Montrelle had won an academic scholarship to St. Mary's, an all-girls Catholic school in New Orleans. "Ever since I was a little girl, I had wanted to go to St. Mary's," she recalled. "I was so happy when I got there. I had just made the dance team. The week the storm came, we were going to start practice."



MARIAN EDELMAN

But two days before Katrina turned on New Orleans, Montrelle, her mother, Cheryl, and little sister, Maliyah, loaded the family car and drove west. Cheryl's sister worked at a New Orleans hotel and her boss found a hotel room for the young family in Houston. Not long afterward, FEMA placed the family in a tidy, modern apartment in southwest Houston, one of the city's highest crime areas.

"It's all right living here," Montrelle said. "What I worry about is the school system and the courses. They can't tell me whether my credits will transfer when I go back. No one can answer that for me." Montrelle misses performing as a New Orleans Hornets' basketball "Stinger," an elite troupe that entertains fans at halftime. And she misses her friends. "Usually, in New Orleans, your friends live five to 10 minutes away from you. Now, they're all in different states."

While Montrelle and her mother fret over the academic implications of moving from New Orleans to Houston and - they hope - back again, Cheryl expresses confidence that Montrelle, always a go-getter, will prevail. In another Houston apartment, Carolyn, another mother from New Orleans, is more concerned about her son, Christopher.

In their home, they count on it like clockwork. Thursday is fight day. Four days into the school week and, at Kashmere High School in Houston, the local and New Orleans kids collide. The weekly bouts have led to suspension or expulsion for several of the two dozen students who fled The Big Easy and landed at Kashmere. Christopher, 16, worries that he could be next.

"I want to get out of Kashmere," he says, solemnly. "They always fighting at Kashmere."

Each side blames the other for the tension and violence. Christopher says the Houston kids "don't like the way we talk" and taunt the New Orleans evacuee students about their clothes, many of them hand-me-downs since most families fled the disaster with nothing. So far, Christopher says, he has managed to avoid coming to blows, but admits it's getting harder, not easier, and adds pointedly, "I ain't scared."

From the looks of it, he's not happy either. Christopher doesn't smile. He wishes aloud that he could transfer to another school; he shrugs off questions about how he's doing, conceding only that he misses his house in New Orleans and his old friends. He is also uncertain about things getting better with time. People in position to make a difference have let him down, he says, claiming the newcomers no longer feel welcome but resented.

Carolyn, Christopher's mother, says she is prepared to make a permanent home in Houston, mainly because there's nothing to return to in New Orleans. She is confident she will find work and that life for the family will improve. But she hopes things settle down quickly for Christopher. He used to be a decent student and never had trouble in school, she said. Now, he's beginning to falter. "Every week - every Thursday - I have to go up to the school. Why? Houston kids want to fight the New Orleans kids," Carolyn said.

Then a broad smile erupts. "Today was a blessed day," she says, "because, guess what? It's Thursday and we didn't have to go to school."

Christopher and Montrelle are just two of thousands of students affected by Hurricane Katrina who are struggling to fit into new schools and keep up with their studies at the same time that they try to adjust to everything else in their lives that have been uprooted. We need to ensure every child in Katrina-affected states a quality public education and after-school and summer educational supports to help them make up for lost time and overcome previous and continuing educational disparities.

The Children's Defense Fund is operating emergency CDF Freedom Schools(tm) programs to help provide homework help, reading enrichment, and art and music to children affected by the hurricanes. For a copy of CDF's report Katrina's Children: A Call to Conscience and Action, visit <http://www.childrensdefense.org>

Bennettsville, S.C., native MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN is president and founder of the Children's Defense Fund.

## To live with HIV means I'm living on borrowed time

By Phill Wilson

NATIONAL NEWSPAPER PUBLISHERS ASSOCIATION

Here's a shocking fact: I'm a middle-aged man. I know it sounds like a pretty run-of-the-mill achievement. But by the time I turn 50 this month, I will have been living on borrowed time for a quarter century. You see, I was infected in 1981. I've lived with the virus so long now that I don't even remember what it was like not to have HIV.



Wilson

The best medical knowledge had me on death's door by 1995. My first partner crossed over that portal in 1989; he's one of literally hundreds of friends, loved ones and colleagues who I have watched die from AIDS over the last 25 years.

No, by all rights, I should not be here to see 50. And yet, here I am. I could fill a year's worth of columns speculating on what blessings have sustained me all these years - and I'll spare you that. But I know one thing that's surely helped keep me going: My determination to beat this damned virus, not just in my own body but in the communal body of Black America.

Like me, the AIDS epidemic has a shocking birthday this year. It was 25 years ago in June that Dr. Michael Gottlieb diagnosed a strange illness among six of his patients at University of California Los Angeles. Since then, AIDS has become a defining issue of our time - particularly for black folks.

The statistics, no matter how many times I speak them, bear repeating. Nearly half of the more than 1 million Americans estimated to be living with HIV/AIDS are black. We represent more than 56 percent of the new AIDS cases among youth. We're nearly 70 percent of the new AIDS cases among women.

No one expected HIV to be around this long, any more than they expected it of me. And those two facts have me thinking about the next 50 years.

Some say middle-age is defined by the point in your life when you stop seeing just possibilities and start seeing a rising wall of the limitations - health, finances, time left on life's clock. Not so for me. Perhaps it's because of where I've been, but this birthday has me thinking about nothing more than where me and my community are going.

Are we headed into another 25 years of this epidemic? Another 50 years? Will I allow that to happen, or will I do my part to stop the spread of this utterly preventable disease and to ensure wide access to the sort of quality healthcare that will allow everyone already diagnosed with it to live into their middle-ages and beyond?

For me, the answers are clear: I will continue to take care of myself. I will continue to refuse to put the people I love at risk. I will continue to refuse to live in shame about my HIV status or my sexual identity as a black gay man. I will continue to speak my truth to power.

I will also continue to demand that my elected officials - from the school board to the White House - make this epidemic a priority. And I will continue to help my community and its leaders - from family to faith to politics - to do the same.

America's ability to defeat the AIDS epidemic will be determined by our ability to stop it in black America. The only way to stop AIDS in Black communities is for there to be strong institutions with the infrastructure and capacity to make it happen.

And the only way to build that infrastructure is for each and every one of us, including you, to do our part. Call your local black AIDS organization, volunteer and make a donation. You can also make a donation to my favorite AIDS organization - the Black AIDS Institute.

Contact your member of congress, your senator and the White House. Tell them to reauthorize the Ryan White CARE Act and to lift the ban on federal funding for needle exchange programs.

Next Sunday, ask your minister to start an AIDS ministry and sponsor HIV testing at the church four times a year. Tonight at dinner, make a list of 12 things you will do over the next year to end the AIDS epidemic. If you can't think of any thing else to do, at least get tested and take a friend with you.

I should have been dead years ago. Instead, I'm looking forward to an amazing and challenging rest of my life - and to seeing the day when I finally out-live this epidemic. Wanna give me a great birthday gift? Help me make it happen.

PHILL WILSON is CEO and founder of the Black AIDS Institute in Los Angeles. He has participated in numerous international conferences on AIDS and was selected by the Ford Foundation in 2001 as one of "Twenty Leaders for a Changing World." Wilson has been living with HIV for more than 25 years and with AIDS for 15 years. He can be reached at [Phillw@BlackAIDS.org](mailto:Phillw@BlackAIDS.org).

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## Who'll be North Carolina's next Bill Friday?

"Who is going to be the next Bill Friday?"

At an event to celebrate 35 years of UNC-TV's weekly program "North Carolina People," someone looked me in the eye and asked that question.

Although we know Mr. Friday best as the president emeritus of the University of North Carolina and the host of "North Carolina People," the questioner was worried about something else that Mr. Friday means to our state.

"Who is going to stand above politics, get the attention of the decision-makers, and always push for the things to make North Carolina better?" he continued.

The simple answer to his question is that there is not going to be another William Friday.

Some people will tell you that the center of momentum for action in North Carolina is not in the state capitol in Raleigh or the business metropolis of Charlotte. Instead, they say, it is a small office overlooking the old campus in Chapel Hill where William Friday spends much of his time. Streams of visitors come to seek his advice and blessings on their projects. But he does not wait for visitors. Most days he will spend several hours on the telephone "with old friends" finding out about their families and what they are doing for North Carolina.

He could be calling the governor, or the leaders of the legislature, or the state's education leaders, or the editorial writers of the state's large newspapers, or any one of hundreds of his long-time friends who can make things happen. By keeping in touch with such people, he knows which ones of them to call when a good project needs help or a good idea needs a little push.

Friday has been building and working this network of people all his life - all 85 years of it. The network of trusted friends grew during his 30-year presidency of the University of North Carolina and was an important reason for his success.

Now, 20 years after his retirement as university president, Friday and his network keep on serving North Carolina.

So my friend who is worried about "the next Bill Friday" ought to remember that even if we could replace Mr. Friday, his network of trusted friends took many years to build.

Understanding that there is not going to be a "next Bill Friday" and that his network cannot be transferred to anyone else, is there anybody who comes close?

Are there others who know the state well, have a keen sense of politics, have a large group of trusted friends and contacts who can make things happen and have the time, energy, and commitment to work full time for the interest of North Carolina?

What about our former governors? They have had to build statewide groups of friends, and they certainly have to study the state's problems and opportunities. All our living former governors have built additional areas of expertise. Robert Scott served as president of the community college system. Jim Holshouser is the senior member of the university's board of governors. Jim Martin serves in the health care policy and research area.

Jim Hunt practices law, farms, and keeps his hands busy in educational policy issues. He has his own network of "key" people he can call for advice and help. He may not be the "next Bill Friday," but the two men share a continuing commitment to make the state better. And, it should be noted that some people already ask a similar "who is going to be the next..." question about Jim Hunt.

Another person we should expect to play a "Bill Friday-type" role is the new university president, Erskine Bowles. Over a lifetime of business, political, and public service activities, Bowles has built his own network of friends who trust him, and who, like Friday's friends, have a hard time saying no to a request for help.

Bowles may not be "the next Bill Friday." But I will be surprised if, a few years from now, somebody doesn't come up to me with a worried look on his face and ask, "Who is going to be the next Erskine Bowles?"

D.G. MARTIN is host of UNC-TV's "North Carolina Bookwatch," which airs on Sundays at 5 p.m.



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