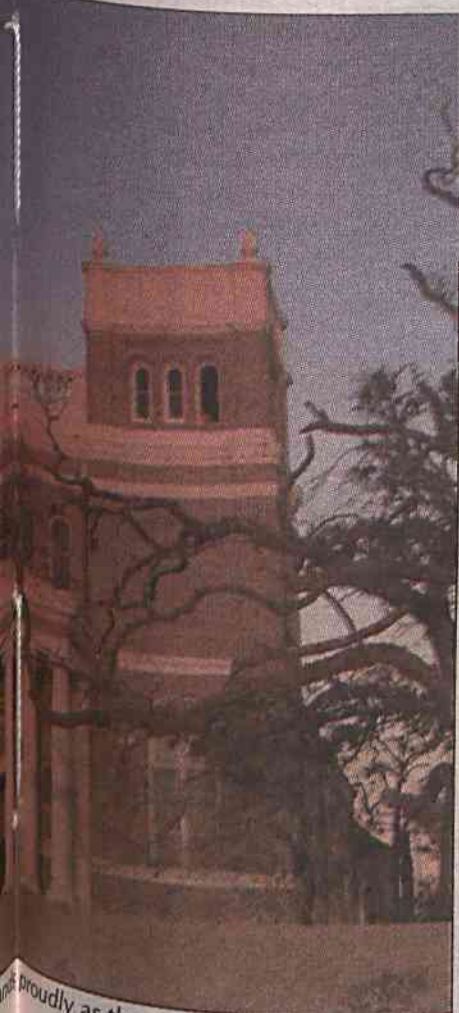


ns ride out storm and watch destruction unfold



...proudly as the sun rises on the Gulf.



Molly Dugan, junior, looks at the photos that Janet Freeman took during Hurricane Katrina. The Freemans attempted to ride out the storm in their home but were forced to seek higher ground at Janet's sister house next door.

It's what's on the inside that counts. Donnie and Janet Freeman welcomed volunteers from Elon with open arms on a Sunday afternoon as they arrived to help clean up.

As the students approached the house they looked at each other in question. The yard was clear of sticks and debris. It appeared to be in significantly better shape than the rest of the town. So why did these people need help?

The Freemans didn't hesitate to invite the volunteers into their house. It was then that students realized their purpose for helping this family. Nothing remained on the inside. Only the framework was still standing. The drywall had been torn out by Donnie Freeman, and what was left is probably sitting in the Gulf. Standing in the corner of the master bedroom, you can see all the way to the opposite corner of the house where the Freemans had their living room.

The Freemans' house is located a mile and a half inland from the Gulf of Mexico and is 23 feet above sea level. The last thing they expected was for a tidal wave to cover the town of Bay St. Louis, Miss. and take everything with it. That is why they decided to ride out Hurricane Katrina.

"We felt safe," Donnie Freeman said. "We rode out Camille and Betsy." Camille and Besty devastated the same area in 1969 and 1965 respectively. Before Katrina made landfall she was drawing comparisons to these previous natural disasters. The Freemans felt well-versed with these storms and knew what to do.

"We knew how to prepare," Donnie Freeman added. "We gassed up our six cars and waited." The winds began to pick up in the afternoon and Donnie decided to move his family when a large tree fell in the front yard.

"We went over to my sister's house because they are a little higher and have two stories," Janet Freeman said. Janet's sister, Geraldine Rutherford, lives with her husband, JD, next door. From the Rutherford residence the two families watched the water come in and begin to swallow everything around the neighborhood. The Freemans said the water level rose and receded in less than 30 minutes.

"Camille was a windstorm with 160 mph winds," Donnie Freeman said. "Water is what made Katrina destructive." The water line reached 52 inches inside the Freeman's home and took everything except a white, wooden baby crib.

As the water rose, Donnie thought of his long tenure in Bay St. Louis. He's lived there for 54 years, as has Janet. Their house on Ninth Street has been their residence for 19 years and they don't intend on ending that run now.

"I was watching 32 years of hard work go down the drain," Donnie said. "But now we will try to revive family heirlooms." Donnie Freeman is affiliated with Hancock Bank in Mississippi. In 1969, when Hurricane Camille ravished the area, the company released a slogan saying

"Together we build." Now, in 2005, Hancock Bank has modified the slogan to "Together we rebuild."

...her house. She said
...and most of the