

CONTINUED

Laughter and on-the-stoop life support

ROSE, from D-1

with, someone to talk to, something — God help us — something to do.

We nodded. Yeah, we are men without their women. Women without their men. Parents without their children.

But not without beer.

And he got out of the car and he sat with us for hours and we told our stories to each other and asked about each others' families, now spread across the planet, and when it was over we had a new friend. A displaced dad. Just looking for a place we used to call home.

We stoop-sitters tend to get very wry and blend dark humor with our rants against the machine, but sometimes it gets very sad.

We often deal with First Timer Syndrome. As my immediate neighbors trickle back into town, one by one — either just to clean up and move on or to move back in for good — they generally end up on my stoop. And they often cry.

It's the first time they've been back to town and they are shaken to their very core at what they've seen and smelled and we grizzled veterans of this war try to provide shelter from their storm.

They apologize for losing it but we tell them that many tears have been shed here on this stoop and they are ours and it's OK. It happens to all First Timers. Hell, it happens still.

They're easy to spot, the First Timers. They either sob or they sit silent and sullen, the occasional pull on a bottle of beer, with very little to add to the conversation of the night.

The next night, they usually come back, and they are a little better. One day at a time. Ain't that the way of life around here?

We sit around night after night because some of us are unable to sit still in a restaurant for 90 minutes or aren't ready to go back to the bar scene. Many can't concentrate on reading and television seems like an empty gesture so we talk, and we talk about the same damn thing over and over.

We talk about it. The elephant in the room.

I suspect many folks have sat with us and thought, upon going home: You guys need to get a grip. You need to talk about something else. You need to get a life.

That may be, but I, personally, have been unable to focus on anything but the elephant. I have tried to watch TV or read a magazine but when I see or hear phrases like "Tom and Katy" or "World Series" or "Judge Miers," my mind just glazes over and all I hear is the buzz of a fluorescent light. That is the sound of my cerebral cortex now.

I can't hear what they're saying on TV. I don't know what they're talking about. I think: Why aren't they talking about the elephant?

Once, in an out-of-town airport, I searched desperately for something to read about the elephant, but we have been tossed off the front pages by other events. Finally I found a magazine with a blaring headline: "WHAT WENT WRONG" and I thought, finally, something about us.

It turns out, though, it was People magazine and "WHAT WENT WRONG" was not about FEMA or the levees or the flood, but about Renee Zellweger and Kenny Chesney.

And the fluorescent light goes zzzzzzz.

One newcomer to the stoop one night said something along the lines of, "Can you believe that call at the end of the White Sox game the other night?" And you would usually think that such a statement made in a group of drinking men would elicit an argument, at least — if not a bare-knuckle brawl — but the fact is we all responded with silence.

We're a porch full of people who don't know who's playing in the World Series and don't know what movies opened this week and don't know how many died in Iraq today.

We are consumed. We would probably bore you to tears. But it is good therapy and we laugh more than we cry, and that's a start, that's a good thing, that's a sign of winning this war, of getting this damn elephant out of our city — out of our sight.

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Message received

MESSAGING, from D-1

gets overloaded with voice calls, the data network can still send out text messages, said Brian Wood, a spokesman for Verizon Wireless.

The technology proved itself in other major storms, including the blackouts that hit the Northeast in 2003 when cell voice calls failed but text messages got through.

"People find out about it and word gets around," Wood said.

Once popular mostly with the young and tech-savvy, text messaging is growing in popularity in this country. M:Metrics, a wireless market research firm, reports that 67 million U.S. mobile phone subscribers, or about 37 percent, sent or received text messages in August.

No one knows how many text messages flew to and from New Orleans cell phones after the storm, but it's clear that they provided a vital link for many people and helped in rescues and reunions.

Rescuers monitored online postings, where family members relayed frantic text messages from people trapped in New Orleans homes. On the Web site www.nolarefugees.com, strangers also offered to send text messages for people who didn't know how.

After reading heartbreaking rescue requests posted by family members on Nola View, a Web log on NOLA.com, Beth Berry of Anderson, S.C., used text messaging to make contact with people trapped in their New Orleans homes.

She called family members who'd posted their phone numbers on the site and asked for the cell phone numbers of their trapped loved ones. "I figured out that if I had cell phone numbers, I could get through with a text message, since all the cell and land lines were jammed," she said.

"What I would do was go to the Web site for each carrier and send a text message to the numbers until I hit the jackpot," she said.

"I would send a message to let them know that their family is trying to report their whereabouts, and I would get calls back or messages back," Berry said. "I talked to at least 15 people through text messaging, including some really unlikely candidates, like a 78-year-old."

"I would tell them that I was calling in for a rescue, and needed their cross streets, age and any health problems."

When she could get through on a land line, she spent time talking to the people she made contact

TEXT MESSAGING BASICS

▶ Most newer cell phones are set up to send and receive text messages of up to 160 characters at a time.

▶ Using a cell phone, users first access the message option on the phone and select the recipient. Then, using the unit's keypad, they compose a message, based on corresponding letters. Many phones have "predictive text," a feature that anticipates words as users press keys. Some also allow users to program common phrases.

▶ Messages often are made up of abbreviations and short sentences to save typing. For example: Y? (Why?), MTG 2MORO?

(Meeting tomorrow?) and WILL B L8 4 DNR (Will be late for dinner).

▶ Many phones can receive text messages sent by e-mail if the sender knows the recipient's service provider. Most allow you to send an e-mail as usual with a special code after the @ symbol. For example, Verizon Wireless: 5045551234@vtext.com.

If you know the person's wireless provider, but not the format, contact the company's customer service department.

▶ Remember, additional fees apply and the amount varies based on service provider and calling plan.

with, many of them elderly, Berry said.

"I was trying to be really calm, like a rock," she said. "I wanted to sound almost like one of the rescue workers, because I felt like a rescue worker."

Berry said she rarely uses text messaging in her personal life, but as a marketing executive, she recognizes the technology's potential for getting information to large numbers of people.

"I just kept thinking to myself, why hasn't FEMA or the White House and other organizations figured out how to use text messaging in situations like this?" she said.

"They could have sent text messages letting people know how far away was food and water, or where they needed to go to be rescued. They could have set up a central database where people who needed help could text where they were."

While use of text messaging is growing in the United States, it is far less ubiquitous here than in other countries.

Idle N.O. waiters will work in Baton Rouge

GALATOIRE'S, from D-1

promote the recently released "Galatoire's Cookbook."

Rodrigue declined to comment on the new restaurant's location in Baton Rouge before signing the lease agreement, which he expects could happen today. While an employee at Caspian Seafood and Steak confirmed that talks have been ongoing with Galatoire's brass to take over the restaurant, Caspian's management was unavailable for comment. Caspian is at 17451 Perkins Road in Baton Rouge.

While acknowledging that Hurricane Katrina hastened the expansion plans, Rodrigue said Galatoire's management had been exploring opening in Baton Rouge for several years.

"The only reason we were able to do this is because we had all this research done in advance," he said. "This is something that we've been considering for a long time."

Notwithstanding Rodrigue's commitment to the city, the announcement comes at a particularly sensitive time for New Orleanians anxious that the

mass exodus of its culture could become permanent. Ruth's Chris Steak House, the home-grown chain, announced it was relocating its corporate office to Orlando just days after the storm.

And with Baton Rouge now serving as home base to countless evacuated New Orleans residents and businesses, Galatoire's Bistro's opening is just another example that New Orleans' loss is the neighboring city's gain.

"The Baton Rouge market was obvious because of how many people are there who are our customers," Rodrigue said.

Galatoire's is not just another New Orleans restaurant. Last spring, just as its 100th anniversary celebrations were gearing up, it was awarded the prestigious Outstanding Restaurant Award from the James Beard Foundation.

With a menu that has hardly changed in a century, Galatoire's is to French-Creole cuisine what the Alamo is to Texan bravado, and the regulars who make its main floor dining room one of the city's great social stages tend to view



STAFF FILE PHOTO

Galatoire's will call its Baton Rouge location Galatoire's Bistro.

even minor changes to the culinary temple with fear and loathing. Three years ago, the uproar over the firing of long-time waiter Gilberto Eyzaguirre made national news.

"I'm sure some people will consider it a Tom Benson move," said Dr. Brobson Lutz, a longtime Galatoire's regular and, as it happens, antagonist. "The founding fathers of Galatoire's opened Galatoire's in a

city of less than 200,000 people, which is what we have now. If that population is good enough for the founders, I don't know why it isn't good enough for the current owners."

Rodrigue said the intention is not to replicate the Bourbon Street Galatoire's. Galatoire's Bistro's menu will include many of the classics from the original, including shrimp remoulade, oysters Rockefeller

and cafe brulot, although it will be much shorter, and abetted by dishes from the French bistro tradition, such as escargots in puff pastry and charcuterie plates.

"Galatoire's restaurant in New Orleans is as special as it is because it can't be duplicated," Rodrigue said. "That is why we're trying to set the tone by changing the name to Galatoire's Bistro."

The new restaurant will, however, contain many familiar faces. It will be managed by Justin Frey, a Galatoire's family member, who Rodrigue said is planning to move permanently to Baton Rouge. The dining room will also be populated by many longtime Galatoire's waiters. At least at first.

"Obviously, when New Orleans opens, this where their home is, and this is where (the waiters) will want to be," Rodrigue said. "But just having them (in Baton Rouge) on the front side will leave some seasoning."

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TV show steeled them for storm

WALKER, from D-1

This season of the CBS reality game show, which airs Tuesday at 8 p.m. on WWL Channel 4, pits families —

some nuclear, some virtual — in a long-distance race for a \$1 million prize.

With the episode's concluding segment staged at Preservation Hall, it was a little weird — and a little sad — to see the contestants racing through the streets of pre-Katrina New Orleans.

What wasn't seen: A police stop on the Causeway — something about an extra toll for a car-top luggage carrier — that might've cost the Schroeders the game.

Their tearful elimination was followed by an eerie interview with Mark Schroeder that foreshadowed how the "Race"

experience toughened the family for whatever fate might throw at them.

"It was very much practice for what we had to go through a month later," he said, during a post-elimination family interview via telephone.

The family — Mark, his kids Stassi and Hunter, his wife Char — had trained for the show both physically (strenuous workouts) and mentally (watching tapes of old seasons to study strategies).

"Every night," said Char Schroeder, a publicist for local Marriott hotels. "It was like homework."

But the race itself proved

"10 times harder" than it looks on TV, said Stassi Schroeder, once a student at Mount Carmel Academy who with her brother, a Brother Martin student pre-Katrina, now attends the gender-blended recovery academy hosted by Archbishop Rummel High School.

"You're so wrapped up in it," Stassi added. "It consumes you. All you're thinking about is continuing, this one goal of winning. Just the thought of it slipping away, of it all ending was way too much for us to bear. That's why we broke down."

The elimination slip-up "was bad luck," Mark

Schroeder said. "If you look back over all the past shows, the people who were eliminated got into traffic jams or took wrong turns."

Still, he added, "There's no way we could be any more thrilled with the experience."

And if there's ever an "Amazing Race" all-star edition, count on the Schroeders as potential players.

"If they ever have one, you can get bet your bottom," Stassi Schroeder said. "I'll be banging on the door."

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