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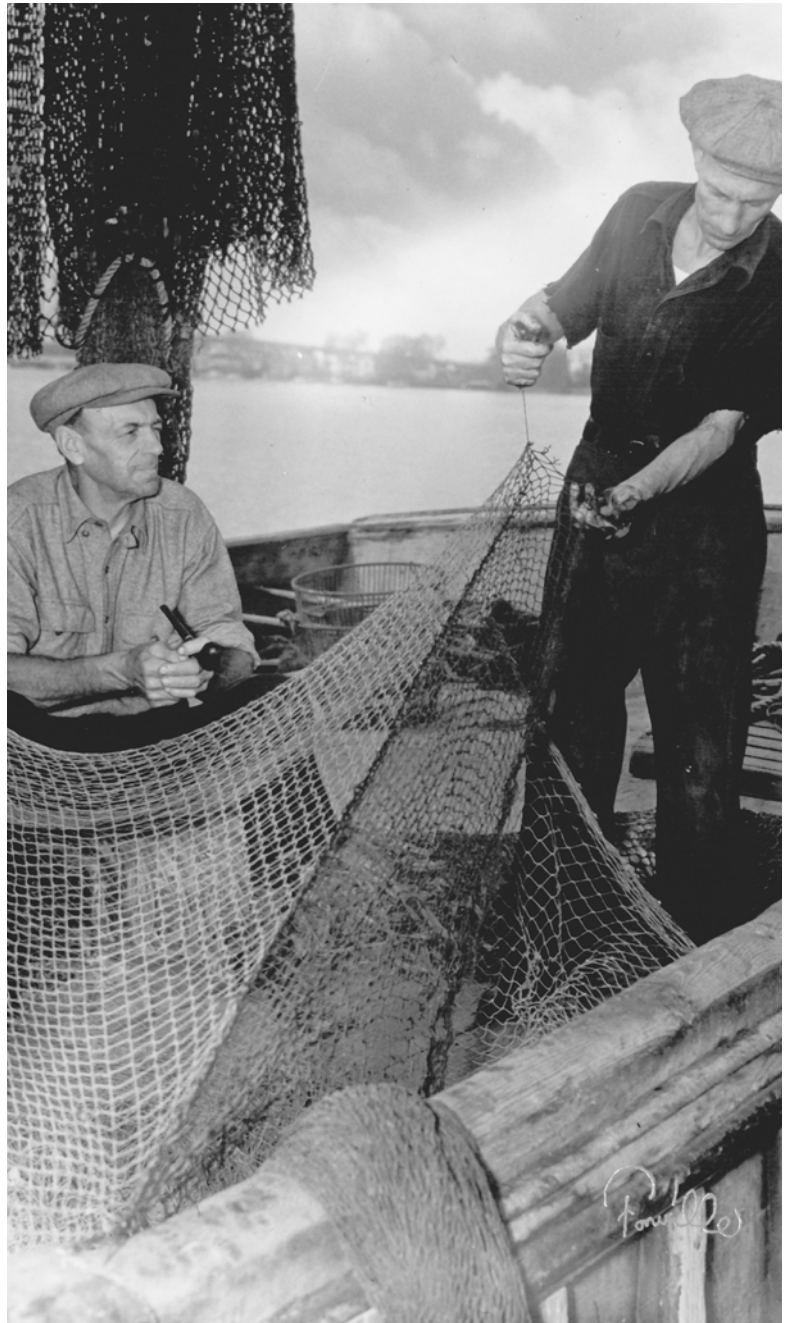
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Foreword by: Gaspar J. “Buddy” Stall

Because of the unprecedented destructive double whammy caused by both flooding and winds of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, in time hundreds of books will be written about America’s greatest tragedy. Eighty percent of the City of New Orleans was under water, not because of nature’s wrath, but because of the Corps of Engineers’ ineptness when building the levees and the Federal Government’s procrastination in dealing with coastal erosion. Hundreds of thousands of New Orleanians were displaced to forty-two different states, and after seven months, the majority (estimated 80%) of those displaced are still residing outside their homes with no immediate relief in sight.

In all fairness, those who live and work outside the destruction area, even though you have watched it for hours and hours on television, unless you have seen it with your own eyes, you really have no idea of the magnitude of the damage.

Almost all of the books that reference Katrina and Rita will no doubt pictorially and verbally describe the unequalled human sufferings of people from Texas to Alabama.

Amy Sins, in writing her book tells of not the Phoenix rising from the ashes but her personal story of making her way through her home that had eight feet of water plus two to three feet of the slimiest, smelliest, ungodly mud God has ever put on earth. You can imagine the shock of going into a site like that and seeing that everything you loved and amassed in your lifetime is completely lost.

Amy shares her personal experience of dealing with the aftermath of Katrina and Rita, but her focal point is the City’s fabulous food with the all-important need of passing down family recipes from generation to generation. It is her way of sharing with her readers and at the same time maintaining her sanity. As lagniappe, she includes a large and varied number of recipes for her readers to try. In doing so, they would be reminded of one of the unique things to New Orleans, its food.

Just as masters like Rembrandt, Michael Angelo and Leonardo Davinci, using paintbrushes and chisels to bring their paintings and statues to life, Amy has mastered words to the point one feels they are there. It is presented in an enjoyable, easy to read format. I am confident that after reading Ruby Slippers, you will be anxious as I to recommend it to your family and friends. For every misfortune there is always good fortune.

Amy’s book falls into the latter category. New Orleanians love their food, be it an elegantly served seven course meal on china and crystal with linen napkins at Antoine’s, the world’s oldest family restaurant, located in New Orleans, or a simple seven course meal consisting of a cold six pack of Dixie Beer and a sloppy roast beef with an abundance of paper napkins.

New Orleanians love of food could be summed in the following. A man who worked in Atlanta, Georgia, called to tell his father he was coming in for a visit. He asked how long he planned on being in town. His response, sixteen meals.

In addition to having some of his favorite dishes only his mother can prepare, he requested reservations be made for him, and his wife, at Casamento's for an oyster loaf, Mothers for their fabulous breakfast, brunch at Begue's in the Royal Sonesta, stuffed seafood artichoke at Carmine's, fried chicken at Mr. Ed's, barbeque at Hillbilly Bar-B-Q, catfish at Adams Catfish House, soul food at Dooky Chase, prime rib at the Rib Room at the Royal Orleans, and emphatically requested that his last meal be a sloppy roast beef at Buddy's in Metairie, and if time allowed, he wanted to go to Donaldsonville to eat some Cajun food at The Grapevine.

As someone once reported, New Orleanians don't eat to live, they live to eat.

As Amy so ably points out, our home and professional recipes are city treasures and should be preserved for future generations. Yes, Rita and Katrina might knock us down but they will never knock out our taste buds.

Laissez les bon tons rouler and Bon Appetite!

Gaspar J. "Buddy" Stall

During our lifetime we are all asked to make a toast at a wedding, graduation or some other special occasion. The following is a sure fire winner:

May I wish each and every one of you every day of your lives steal, swear and lie.

Steal a little time every day to help those less fortunate; swear to do only those things right in the eyes of the Lord, and be sure to lie in the arms of the one you love every night and tell them you love them.



The area was completely deserted, and everything was gray. There were no birds, there was no grass and there were no people. I didn't even see any mosquitoes! All signs of life appeared nonexistent, except for the occasional National Guard troops patrolling the area.

We drove past X's everywhere, busted roofs where people escaped and flooded out cars as far as the eye could see. I could tell my grandfather's neighbors were saved and so were the people down the street. I worried about the old man in the walker that lived four blocks away. I prayed that someone evacuated him and his little white dog.

The entire experience was like being in a black and white movie. It looked as if a bomb had gone off, but without the fire. I just looked around trying to find any shade of color other than gray.

When we finally navigated through the debris and saw our home, we were a little relieved to see that it was still there. The outside was very deceiving. The damage appeared to be pretty mild, but it wasn't.

I'm not sure what we were thinking, but we assumed that we would walk right up to the house, open the front door and grab a few things. Not a chance. When we reached the entryway, I looked through the dirty window. I could see the large ottoman for the sofa wedged against the door. It wasn't supposed to be there. I could also see the outdoor lawn chairs in our foyer; they weren't supposed to be there either.

We soon realized that opening the front door would prove an impossible feat and that climbing the piles debris on the side of the house and getting to the backyard would be the only option. We moved aside flowerpots, wood, bricks and things that were unidentifiable and then made our way into the backyard. Once there, we saw a barren landscape. Gone were the new plants, gravel paths and fence that were part of our newly designed backyard. All that was left was mud, dead plants and debris from someone's home. We found a Brittany Spears CD, stuffed animals and an ice chest that were not ours. We also noticed that our lawn furniture, flowerpots and garden accessories were not there! The large pecan tree was dead and lying on our shed. The fence was down and spread in every direction, and our back doors were gone.

Nothing looked like it did when George evacuated.

And then it hit us, the smell. It was awful! Some of you won't understand, but I can only compare it to a port-a-potty on the last day of Jazz Fest or Mardi Gras or worse. Yes, it was that bad, and we had to endure it to enter our home. The smell is so distinct that I can close my eyes far away from New Orleans and still smell it. I will forever smell mold when I think of my house.

With masks, rubber boots and gloves we climbed the debris on the back porch. There was a six-inch layer of black slimy mud throughout our entire home, and our doors were somewhere underneath it. Walking was treacherous because the mud was incredibly slippery.



Stephen, Dawn and Baby Madelyn

Hurricane Katrina was fast approaching when Stephen and Dawn began discussing their plans.

During her last doctor's visit, Dawn was given a copy of her medical records by her physician, just in case she might need them. Her doctor also instructed that if things looked grim, Dawn should go to Memorial Hospital where generators and supplies would be available. Dawn's medical condition was somewhat fragile. Her baby was due at any minute, the baby was expected to be big, she had gestational diabetes, and complications were expected.

Stephen and Dawn suggested to their families to evacuate to Houston. They promised that if the weather escalated and they were without power, the couple would go to the hospital immediately.

On Sunday morning they awoke to a big change; Katrina had grown tremendously and was turning for New Orleans. They were beginning to get scared. Dawn's fragile nerves were even more frayed when no one answered the phone at her physician's office.

The hospital suggested that Dawn and Stephen leave town. They evaluated the traffic situation and assumed it was better to go west towards Florida.

They packed the car with the hospital overnight bag, a car seat, three days of clothes, a little traveling food, and Barkley, their golden retriever and headed towards Florida.

Dawn furiously called hotels as Stephen drove them to safety. They were fortunate to find two hotels with openings, one in Pensacola and one a little closer to New Orleans. They were a little worried about traveling too far in with Dawn's condition but decided that the extra thirty minutes away from New Orleans would be a better decision, so they chose the hotel in Pensacola.

Dawn believed that she was having contractions during the drive, but was determined to make it out of harm's way. Once they reached the hotel, they were exhausted and ready to sleep. Their hotel lost electricity and only had peanut butter and jelly to eat. They waited out the storm and received a call from a friend about the turmoil in New Orleans. The friend suggested that they get to a hospital immediately because returning home soon would not be an option.

Searching for an available hospital proved to be more difficult than searching for an available hotel. The two traveled to Birmingham where a family member had arranged for medical care and a physician to deliver Dawn's baby. They arrived on Thursday and consulted with a doctor on Friday. Luckily, she had all the medical records that she needed.

By Monday, Dawn was in labor and by Tuesday, beautiful baby Madelyn was born.

Though their experience was scary and unfortunate, the couple easily looks past it. Every time Dawn gazes upon Madelyn's beautiful face, she is overwhelmed with happiness and has proof that something perfect can result from a terrible situation.



Black Eyed Peas

1 pound dry black eye peas (preferably Camellia)
3 quarts of water
1 large onion, chopped
2 toes garlic, chopped
4 stalks celery, chopped
1 bell pepper, chopped
1 bunch green onions, chopped (white and green parts)
1 pound beef smoked sausage, sliced
1 pound seasoned ham, or a ham steak, cut into pieces
Creole seasoning to taste
black pepper to taste

"I always serve anything like this with Crystal Hot Sauce and cornbread."
Karen

Wash peas and put them in large pot with water. Bring to a boil and add onion and garlic. When it comes to a boil again, turn heat down to very low. Let this cook for about an hour, stir occasionally. Then add celery, bell pepper, sausage and ham. Cook on low for several more hours, stir occasionally and add green onions. Add the remaining seasonings to taste. To get the smooth consistency, melt a half stick of butter in a separate small pan, add two to three tablespoons of flour and fry this down for about 5 minutes till smooth but not turning brown, stirring constantly. Then turn the beans up to a higher heat and get them boiling real good, add the roux, stir in totally and reduce heat immediately. They should then be the right consistency, but they will begin to stick to the bottom of the pan if not on low heat. Serve with rice of choice.

Black Eyed Peas and Cabbage

It's tradition to serve black eyed peas and cabbage every New Year's Day. As a child I refused to eat either, but my parents bordered on child cruelty by making me eat one pea and a sliver of cabbage every year. They said it was for my own good! You see, black eyed peas bring good luck, and cabbage brings money. This year I had a full serving of both; I needed it!

Muffulettas

- 1 jar Boscoli Olive Salad with oil
- 1 round loaf Italian bread
- 1/4 pound mortadella, thinly sliced
- 1/4 pound ham, thinly sliced
- 1/4 pound hard Genoa salami, thinly sliced
- 1/4 pound Mozzarella cheese, sliced
- 1/4 pound Provolone cheese, sliced

Cut an (muffuletta) Italian loaf horizontally. Spread each half with equal parts of olive salad and oil. Layer the remaining ingredients and cut in quarters. Enjoy!



Leftover Olive Salad?

Mix it with 6 ounces of feta cheese, 4 tablespoons olive oil and 1-2 tablespoons balsamic vinegar. Serve over mixed greens as a tangy salad dressing.

George's Famous Bloody Mary

- 1 bottle Major Peters Blood Mary Mix
- 2 squeezed lemons
- 2 squeezed limes
- 3 tablespoons of Worcestershire sauce
- 1 tablespoon celery salt
- 1 tablespoon lemon pepper
- 1 tablespoon Louisiana Red Hot Sauce
- 1 shot vodka per glass

Combine all ingredients except vodka, stir well and chill. Add vodka immediately before serving. Serve over ice and garnish.

Eight Months Later

Dear Reader,

You may ask yourself, “What is it like there now?”

Eight months, ten months and twelve months later, progress is extremely slow. Homes are still filled with moldy furniture, families are still displaced, and trash is still piled up in neighborhood streets.

Thousands of homes and business still need repairs and contractors are difficult to find. Construction prices have skyrocketed and there are bidding wars for the few available apartments. Traffic is still out of control, every conversation still begins with, “Before Katrina,” and the smell of mold is still clinging to the air.

Unfortunately, there appears to be no end in sight and hurricane season is upon us again.

Our homes and lives are in shambles and our futures are uncertain. Local, state, and national leaders cannot agree on a plan and homeowners are forced to endure the consequences of the politicians’ inaction.

Just because a home was flooded, and is uninhabitable, and government leaders cannot decide if a neighborhood will be rebuilt, it doesn’t mean the mortgage company isn’t asking for a check each month.

We’ve tried to lighten our mood with food and festivals. Mardi Gras was the best I can ever remember, French Quarter fest was a much needed break from reality, and Jazz Fest was something we all had to experience once more. We seek comfort in our food and our heritage, but that alone is not enough to rebuild a city.

Lately, it seems as if our situation is no longer national headline news. Some out-of-towners believe we are getting too much coverage; they’re tired of hearing it. That must mean everything is resolved right? That is definitely not the case! We’re not OK, but we are getting better.

Please don’t forget about us. Don’t forget about the families who lost loved ones, the people who lost their homes and the reasons why this disaster happened. Keep in mind the ruined family photos, recipes and other priceless life possessions that are now only memories as a result of this unfortunate event. Don’t forget about the businesses that can’t survive or the schools that are now closed.

The number of people outside of the region who believe that New Orleans and the surrounding areas are back to normal amazes me. This by no means is true; this is not normal, and life is not normal anymore. Before Katrina, it was not normal to share a one bedroom apartment with 14 relatives, it was not normal to see devastation everywhere you turn and it was not normal to wonder if your friends have relocated or just haven't been found.

Many New Orleanians feel forgotten by the rest of the nation because they see no real progress and feel nobody cares. The millions and billions of dollars sent to the area to assist in the rebuilding process are being spent but little, if any, has made it into the hands of homeowners. Many local residents wonder, "What if this were New York? What if this were San Francisco? Would they be in the same situation eight, ten or twelve months later?"

Many outsiders don't want to hear the truth, it's depressing. Yes it is! We live it every day. It can wear you down. But that doesn't mean if we ignore the situation, it will go away. We can't pretend that our lives have returned to Technicolor, but we can make it happen if we rebuild with a genuine commitment.

The citizens who are back in New Orleans are making a daily sacrifice for a home they love and a culture worth saving. We sacrifice our sanity by listening to the bickering, finger pointing and politics while we look devastation in the face, and see little progress. Our struggle is not over.

We mourn the loss of our fellow citizens and worry about the loss of our unique culture. We work hard every day to pick up the pieces of our lives and rebuild the city we love, with or without help.

We enjoy what is left of our city by dancing in the streets at festivals, dining with family and friends and reveling with strangers at Mardi Gras. That is what keeps us going and that is what makes us who we are.

Yes, we have been hit hard, and yes it will be a long road ahead. Despite all that has been thrown our way, we still maintain hope. Hope that New Orleans will once again be a great place to live. Hope that our fellow citizens can rebuild their lives in the neighborhoods they once knew. Hope that a disaster such as this doesn't happen to anyone else, ever. And hope that during next Mardi Gras and Jazz Fest we can celebrate with friends, family, neighbors, tourists and strangers.

What will we be celebrating? Us! You, me, life, food everything and anything! Maybe we will even be celebrating the New Normal, and maybe we will actually like it. With help, support and understanding, we can do it. New Orleans is our home, and as we all know, "There's no place like home!"

We are traveling the long road back. Care to join us?

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