

Letter from a Mississippi resident on the anniversary of Hurricane Katrina

6 September 2006

The following is a letter sent to the World Socialist Web Site in response to the article, “One year since Hurricane Katrina: the rebuilding of Mississippi’s Gulf Coast”

First let me say thank you for sharing your experience with the world. I have found it really hard here at the year anniversary of Hurricane Katrina to find anyone talking about our area in South Mississippi, as much of the focus is still transfixed, as it has been for a year now, on New Orleans, at least at the national level. You seem to have hit the nail right on the head; our citizens are still truly struggling. My husband and I were lucky. We did have flood insurance on our home in Gautier, Mississippi, and are moving back to that home as soon as possible. (We temporarily relocated to Starkville, Mississippi—trying to keep some sense of normal life for our two-year-old son.)

However, all of our family members and all of our friends were not quite as fortunate. They are all still in FEMA trailers, while making very slow progress rebuilding their homes. They have been forced to take out loans on houses that were paid for because, like most, they did not live in a flood zone and were discouraged from getting flood insurance. As you said, they have to compromise the quality of work being done on their houses because they honestly can’t afford to hire a contractor. Or they are trying to teach themselves and do repairs themselves, which, as you can imagine, is a *very* slow process.

Everyone we know has been affected. It’s really hard to describe unless you have lived through it. In Pascagoula Mississippi, my stepfather has been working 13 hours a day, six days a week for 11 months now—just trying to have the money to buy supplies needed to repair their house that was intruded on by four-and-a-half feet of water, without sacrificing retirement savings as many have done here. He and my

mother come home to their tiny FEMA trailer after working all day, change their clothes and spend the remainder of their night doing what they can in their house. This is the same situation for countless other family members and friends. It is truly a vicious cycle where insurance and grant adjusters get to play God and decided at the stroke of a pen the rest of your life, as that is what it ultimately comes down to and has been made painfully obvious in recent months.

I do want to sincerely thank you and your organization for volunteering and helping those who need it so much in our small towns of Pascagoula and Gautier, Mississippi. It sometimes seems like the rest of the world has forgot about us. Although 80 percent of the homes in Pascagoula had flood damage, I never once heard it mentioned on any of the national news programs. When everyone you know and every business around was flooded/damaged it’s hard to believe that there is a light at the end of the tunnel, or maybe the tunnel is just so long the light isn’t visible yet. But, with continued support from people like you, the Mississippi Gulf Coast will return, maybe not to normal for a while, but any progress is progress, right? In any case, know that your work was truly appreciated and will never be forgotten by those whose lives you touched. Thank you again for bringing some much needed attention to our area and God Bless!

RA

Starkville, Mississippi

30 August 2006



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