

## Miss Janine's Story: Deciding to Stay

*Miss Janine<sup>1</sup> has been a resident of New Orleans since the age of 17. She is 84 years old and has lived alone since the death of her husband in 1992. When Hurricane Katrina threatened, she was in the beauty parlor that she had operated next door to her home for more than forty years. With her neighbor, who also lived alone, Miss Janine decided to ride out the storm in her own house and in the upstairs portion of the beauty parlor building. Two days after the storm had subsided, with the waters surrounding her home, Miss Janine agreed to leave, but only at the insistence of a minister from her local church, who traveled through the flood to rescue her. After a brief relocation with his family, Miss Janine returned to repair her house, which had taken on a few inches of water and was partly destroyed by the fall of a large pecan tree. She has since retired from her beauty parlor, which sits today unrepaired. She is back in her house and still drives to the senior center every day.*

Well, you know, before the storm you prepare. I had all the food, water, and I didn't pack any clothing because I didn't plan to leave. So me and my neighbor next door, Margie<sup>1</sup>—she was single and I was single—she said, “I'm going

---

*Margie said,  
you know I don't want to go,  
and I knew it was because of  
the vow we had made.'*

---

to do what you do,” and I said, “I'm going to do what you do.” I said, “Tell you what, let's decide, since it usually doesn't flood here, let's make a vow that we're both going to stay, we're not going to leave. If you leave, I leave, if I leave, you leave.”

So the day of the storm, we was just sitting down and listening to it. We didn't know really what was going to happen. The neighbors and all, we were just kind of out on the porch. And all of the sudden somebody called us on the phone and said, “Y'all better leave, the levees is broke!” I didn't listen, I thought, “That fool didn't know a thing.” The levees were all the way out in the east, and it just don't flood here. So I said, “We're staying.” We just kept on the porch talking and after a while somebody said, “The water is coming down Claiborne off the overpass!” What? “The water's just at Magnolia Street,” which is just three blocks this way. We all jumped up and I said, “Margie, this sounds bad.”

Margie asked what we should do and I said, “There's not much we can do now, the water is on Magnolia.” So we just said, Oh well. When the water got to our house, you know, the children was playing in it, the children was having

fun. We sat out there and we watched the water really coming now. It got to step one of my porch. . . . When it started getting to step three, I said, “Well, my beauty parlor is right next door. Let’s get some food, some water, a radio, so we can have it and know what’s going on.” So when we got ready, we went out and you know the water was up to my waist. I said, “Y’all know I can’t swim,” and we got them two men next door, two young men, to take us to the beauty parlor.

We went to the second story. Some of the homeless people in the neighborhood, they came up there with us. We all made a pallet, and everyone was laying in there sleeping, and we had food and everything.

As we waited, I said to Margie we got to call her children, because they’re probably calling the house. Margie had a cellular phone. When she got her son, I guess in less than half an hour he was there. He had a man with a truck, and the closest he could get his truck was within a block. When Margie got ready to go, he said to me, “Miss Janine, you know I don’t want to leave you, I’ll take you to Lafayette” (to stay with his sister). I said I couldn’t impose on her. He kept saying things and that he didn’t want to leave me, but I didn’t want to go.

I said I couldn’t leave, because the homeless people was there with nowhere to go. If I leave, they felt they couldn’t stay. You see, you weren’t just worried about yourself, you were worried about everyone with you too. Margie said, “You know I don’t want to go,” and I knew it was because of the vow we had made. So I told Margie I was going to be all right, and she left.

Later we listened to the radio. They came on the radio and said the water was—what is it?—the water was rescinding, going down an inch an hour or something like that. I thought, well, Lord, that’s good news. In the meantime you

know, they had helicopters flying all over. And it was the worst sound you could hear.

Well, I knew I didn’t want to go in no helicopter, I thought, I’m not going. I refuse to go to the Superdome, because I remember the past in the Superdome. I said, “I’m not going there.” First place, I can’t stand up that much. I’m not crippled, but I got arthritis. Where am I going to go to the bathroom? I decided I’m staying home. So when the water started going down, I said, “Y’all, let’s go back home.” Then the phone started ringing; my church members and my stepson, all calling all the time. They said I had to get out. I said I couldn’t, I didn’t have anywhere to go. Why would I get out there in the water? I’m going to stay here! So I woke up the next morning. The water had come back up at this point.

Well, a minister at my church called and said he just had to come get me out. He said help’s on the way and asked if I was ready. He said, “You can’t bring too much; we are going to bring the truck, I’m going to have to put you in the back.” I had my little change purse and a dress, just enough. He drove that truck up here, and finally I was locking the door. He had to drive back through the water the way he came, and when we got further up this way about at St. Charles Street there wasn’t a drop of water! Not a drop of water, only trees. ❧

—Interview conducted and edited by Carolyn Croom, M.A., a research assistant, and Pamela J. Jenkins, Ph.D., a professor, both at the University of New Orleans, New Orleans, La.; and by Abigail Eddy, M.S.S., associate program director of Medicare Education, National Association of Area Agencies on Aging, Washington, D.C.

#### NOTE

1. The names have been changed.